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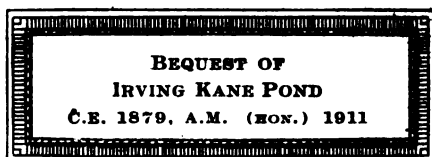
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Excalibur
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Excalibur

Excalibur

An Arthurian Drama

RALPH ADAMS CRAM



BOSTON

RICHARD G. BADGER

The Gorham Press

1909

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Excalibur is the introductory drama of a contemplated trilogy founded on the Arthurian legends as the perfect embodiment of the spirit and impulse of that great Christian epoch we call Mediævalism. The attempt is again made — however inadequately — to do for the epic of our own race, and in a form adapted to dramatic presentation, a small measure of that which Richard Wagner achieved in an allied art for the Teutonic legends.

Excalibur was completed, and in its present form, in the year 1893. Since then no other than verbal changes have been made. This is said for the reason that during the last fifteen years several new dramatic versions of the Arthurian epic have appeared, and the correspondences between them and the present attempt must of necessity be somewhat marked. In every case, however, these are due to the nature of the subject and the compulsion of established and indestructible ideas.

THE AUTHOR

Lady Place,
Storrington, Sussex,
Feast of St. Norbert, 1908

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ARTHUR PENDRAGON: afterwards King of England.

URIENS, King of Gore,

NENTRES, King of Garlot,

LEODEGRANCE, King of Cameliard, } Vassals of England.

DUKE LUCAS OF THE SOUTHFOLK,

DUKE BRASTIAS OF ESTSEX,

RIENCE, King of North Wales,

SIR LAUNCELOT DU LAKE,

SIR TOR,

SIR PELLEAS,

SIR ECTOR,

SIR BREUSE SAUNCE PITÉ,

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

SIR KAY, the Seneschal.

MERLIN.

MORGAN LE FAY, Queen of Gore.

GUENEVER, Daughter to King Leodegrance.

DAME COLUMBE, Wife to Sir Kay.

ETTARD.

YSED.

NIMUE.

Roman Ambassadors, Barons, Knights, Esquires, Citizens,
Priests, Monks, Heralds, Pages, and Lake Girls.

SCENE, *England and Wales.*



Excalibur

PROLOGUE

The curtains open on impenetrable darkness.

MERLIN (*invisible*).

Pendragon passes; now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.
A kingdom passes; now a kingdom's king
Shall raise a kingdom for the King of kings.

(Merlin's figure becomes faintly visible, poised in mid-air.)

Morgan le Fay, rise from the riven rock,
Rise through the waters of the Magic Mere,
Merlin, thy master, calls.

The night is done.
I hear the trumpets of the trampling day,
I see the glimmer of the torch of dawn
Dance like the northern fires along the sky.
The curse is lifted, England wakes again.

ANGELIC VOICES (*above*).

Night passes,
the darkness breaks:
see how the curse
is wafted away!
Down from Heaven,
a beam of light,

Exaltatur

Sinks the smile of the Lord.
England, awake!
Rouse to the cry!
Day is at dawn for the land
for God is aweary of wrath.

MERLIN.

Hark! how the marshalled choristers of God
Proclaim the dawn that burgeons on the world.
Now falls thy kingdom, Morgan, all awrack,
For Uther dies, and England waits a king.
The rune is written: "Now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."
Whereby God's kingdom grows in England.

Rise,
Morgan le Fay! Pendragon passes. Rise!
Pendragon passes, and the night is done.

MORGAN LE FAY (*below, invisible*).

Pendragon passes, but the darkness holds,
And England sleeps: her dawn shall never come
The while I rule the Magic Mere. The day
Is not for her until I loose my hand;
Until the sunken sea and all the gods
That dwell therein, shall fail and fall away,
Dissolving as the mist that meets the sun.

MERLIN.

The sun, the sun! Look where the flaunting host
Of blazing minions mounts the steep of Heaven.
Morgan, thy reign is ended!

MORGAN.

At whose word?

Excalibur

MERLIN.

The word of God, and here I give it thee.
What time King Uther lived, His hand was stayed,
While England paid the grievous penalty
Of evil done, and thou wast given leave
To scourge us with the curse of paynim gods.
Pendragon passes and the ban is raised;
Pendragon's seed is lord.'

MORGAN.

Is lord not yet!
Deep in the Magic Mere I hold the Sword:
Take it, magician, if ye have the hand,
Pendragon wins no worship if ye fail.

MERLIN.

While Uther lived, the Sword was in thy hold;
Pendragon passes, and the Sword is won.

MORGAN.

Thou liest, Merlin, for the Sword is lost!

MERLIN.

Thou liest, Morgan, for within my hand
I hold the proof.

MORGAN.

The proof?

MERLIN.

Excalibur!

(Merlin is illuminated with a dazzling radiance. Four shafts of light shoot upward, downward, and to either hand, as he draws Excalibur, brandishing it aloft in the light.)

Excalibur

MORGAN.

Here to me, all ye dwellers in the mere!
Excalibur is won! Cry treason, cry
Unto the uttermost and deepest depth,
Unto the farthest bounds of all the world,
"Excalibur is won!" Black treason stalks
Stark in the sunken sea: your bootless blades
Rust in their scabbards, hingeless hang the doors
That closed my Castle Terrabil, the walls
I reared to ward Excalibur are cleft
In sunder hopelessly. The Sword returns!

VOICES.

**Queen Morgan calls! Who reft the sleeping Sword
From out our holding? Treason!**

MORGAN.

All is lost,
And we ourselves hurled from our high dominion
Unless ye win him back. Gain me the Sword!
All hangs on this, the night is broken else.

(Dark phantoms dash across the light, assailing MERLIN, who rests motionless. A tumult of cries and of low thunder.)

MERLIN.

**Pendragon passes, and Excalibur
Is for Pendragon's seed. Morgan le Fay,
The sun is bursting from the black abyssm;
Give thee good night, the day breaks on the land.**

Excalibur

MORGAN.

Spirits of darkness from the Magic Mere,
Win me the Sword!

VOICES.

Excalibur is lost,
Our hands are helpless: mighty Merlin conquers.

MORGAN.

Win me the Sword!

VOICES.

Excalibur is lost;
Woe to the people of the Magic Mere!
Woe to thee, Morgan, crownless queen,
Woe!
Woe!

(The spirits vanish downward. MORGAN's voice is heard afar off.)

MORGAN.

Hold the Sword, Merlin, guard it with thy craft:
The day is breaking, but the day will die:
Night follows close. The rune is written. Hear!
"Pendragon passes. Now Pendragon's seed
Shall slay Pendragon for Pendragon's lust.
A kingdom passes, now a kingdom's king
Shall lose a kingdom to the lord of hell."

MERLIN.

Not while Excalibur is in his hand.

MORGAN.

Morgan le Fay shall gain Excalibur.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Not while gray Merlin guards Pendragon's seed.

MORGAN.

Gray Merlin passes, and the night befalls.
Magician, guard thyself! the Sword returns.

MERLIN.

So runs the rune, but God shall gain the day!
Excalibur is won, and England's dawn
Is breaking: cry adown the winds, "All hail,
Arthur Pendragon, King of England, hail!"
Build thou God's city in the wilderness,
Trample the paynim underneath thy feet
And raise the Cross above a thirsty land.
All hail, Pendragon, servant of the Lord!

ANGELIC VOICES (*above*).

Hail, Pendragon,
Lord of the Sword!
Crownèd of England
saviour and king.
Come forth, thou servant of God,
for the dawn is white on the world,
and Christ shall arm thee to-day.
The Sword is won,
hell is confounded,
back from England
cowers the curse.
The Sword Excalibur comes;
follows fast the Kingdom of God!

Excalibur

MERLIN.

So answers Heaven and hell is dumb. The bell
Sounds for the day; go then, Excalibur,
Hold in the heavy rock until the king,
Great England's king, shall gain thee for his own.
So do I send thee, Sword of Avalon,
Down to the waiting world. Pendragon comes!

(He brandishes EXCALIBUR thrice, then hurls it downward: the light vanishes.)

Excalibur

ACT I

SCENE I. *London. The cloisters of St. Paul's. In the midst of the garth is a great runic cross, in the base of which the Sword is buried to the hilt. MERLIN is standing beside it. Without is heard the chanting of the Miserere.*

Enter: the funeral procession of Uther PENDRAGON, the body of the king borne in the midst upon a bier. Before walk many monks, priests, and acolytes. Following comes the ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, attended, and behind him KING NENTRES, KING URIENS, DUKE LUCAS, DUKE BRASTIAS, SIR LAUNCELOT, SIR BREUSE, and other Knights and Barons.

MEN'S VOICES.

Benigne fac Domine in bona voluntate tua Sion,
Ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.

MERLIN.

Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.

MEN'S VOICES.

Justificeris Domine in sermonibus tuis,
Ut vincas cum judicaris.

(The procession crosses the front of the stage: as the bier comes in the centre it is set down and the ARCHBISHOP raises his crosier and speaks.)

Excalibur

ARCHBISHOP.

Lords of the realm and gentlemen at arms,
From all the farthest borders of the land
I summoned ye to answer, under pain
Of ban and interdict of Holy Church.
Uther is dead, and 'gainst his heritage
The ravening kings are leagued. In jeopardy
Lies England, kingless, prey to whoso comes.
Pendragon dies, and dies the last of them
That rulèd England by the grace of God.
The House is fallen, and there is no heir.
Nor law nor custom meets this woful plight
Wherein we sink: yet needs must that a king
Rule over us, lest England be disrupt
And parcelled out in shameful vassalage.
To-day is Easter: on this blessed morning
Lord Jesu rose, wherefore of His great mercy
Perchance this day He may give certain sign
Who by His will shall reign. The love of God
Passeth our wisdom. For a miracle
Fall on your knees, besiege the King of kings
With lusty prayer.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Dear God, a miracle!

OMNES.

O Jesu, hear us!

ARCHBISHOP.

By thy Mother's love,

Lord Jesu, answer!

OMNES.

For thy Mother's love!

Excalibur

MERLIN.

God hears His children, and the word is said.

ARCHBISHOP.

Now speak, magician, if thou hast a tongue,
For in thy words is somewhat ominous
Of welfare to Pendragon's kingdom. Speak!
Where is the sign of God?

MERLIN.

Beneath the cross.

Gather, ye barons and ye knights at arms,
Gather, ye commons from the farthest fields,
And look upon the mercy of the Lord!

(He mounts the steps of the cross.)

See ye the Sword that grows in living rock,
Thrust to the hilt within the closing stone?
See ye the scripture writ around it? Read!
Read ye the rune, and reading, rise and do.
This very night, ere yet was day conceived,
Whilst grimly darkness gripped the cringing earth,
I heard a Voice that cleft the sombre night,
And thus it spake, and speaking died away.
"Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."
And all the night grew white with leaping light
As down the heavenly glory flashed a star,
A streaming fire that thundered to the earth
Riving the rock. Excalibur is come.

OMNES.

Excalibur is come!

Excalibur

ARCHBISHOP. Now unto God
Be laud and honour, that has shown a sign.

DUKE LUCAS.
Pendragon's seed shall reign? What word is this?
Pendragon's seed is ended. Uther died
Void of all heir, and helpless of his House;
How then shall reign his seed?

DUKE BRASTIAS. How reign his seed
When barren lies his field? Shame shows her head:
No bastard reigns in England!

MERLIN. Peace, ye fools!
A rune is written 'round the rigid hilt,
The which I gain, and straightly give it thee,
Most holy father. Read! and reading, rest.

ARCHBISHOP.
"Whoso shall pull this Sword forth of the stone
Is rightwise king, born of all England."

MERLIN. Hear!
Barons and knights and commons; come, essay!
Hale the steel forth, for England lies enwrapped
Around the blade of great Excalibur.

KING NENTRES.
By right I claim the Sword. Have I to wife
Queen Igraine's daughter? Then to her, Elaine,
And so to me, comes England!

Excalibur

KING URIENS. Traitor king,
Morgan le Fay is mine! From Queen Igraine
I gain the daughter's dowry. Give me place,
For so to me comes England.

SIR BREUSE. Hold your hand!
How runs the rune? Pendragon's seed shall
reign,
And not Duke Cornwall's daughter, gotten first
On Igraine ere she lay with Uther. Hold!
Nor look to gain a kingdom with a wife.
I win the Sword that am King Uther's son.

DUKE BRASTIAS.
No bastard reigns in England!

SIR BREUSE. In thy teeth,
Thou damnèd duke, I cast thy scornful word!
Bastard or no, I reign, Pendragon's seed:
Heave up thy sword, for Breuse shall send thee
hence!

DUKE BRASTIAS.
Have at thee, boaster, that would fain be king!

ARCHBISHOP.
Now by authority of Holy Church,
I bid ye cease, else underneath the ban
I cast ye, traitors. Who shall win the Sword
Is rightwise King of England, and none else.
Strike back your swords! What! dare ye hesitate?

Excalibur

Then so I damn ye! —

Good: Now hold your peace!

Merlin, guard thou the Sword: my lords, essay!

KING NENTRES.

England is mine, and thus,—

What craft is here?

The brand is frozen in the iron rock,

Cursèd magician, by what evil spell —

MERLIN.

Give place, King Nentres, England is not thine.

DUKE BRASTIAS.

But mine, and so I lightly win the crown,—

Hell and hell's angels hold thee!

DUKE LUCAS.

For my hand.

Excalibur and England!

MERLIN.

Are not thine.

SIR BREUSE.

Pendragon's seed shall reign. Said so the rune?

Here to me, Sword! What, firmer than the hills?

By God I'll rive the ground up from the rock,

The rock from nether hell, but thou shalt come.

What demons hold thy blade? Unsheathe thyself!

Know'st thou not me? It is Pendragon's seed

That grips thee! Devils rend ye Merlin —

ARCHBISHOP.

Peace!

Fall back, Sir Breuse, the Sword is not for thee.

Excalibur

(*Enter: unperceived, MORGAN LE FAY.*)

SIR BREUSE.

Not now, but after: Merlin, mark me well,
I seize the Sword and England, maugre thy spell.

KING URIENS.

Then ask me for them, fair Sir Breuse, for now
I claim them. Morgan, aid me, that I gain
Thy dowry and a kingdom.

MERLIN.

Stand thou back,
Morgan le Fay, thy gods are helpless here.

MORGAN.

Wait for the proof! King, grasp Excalibur
And cry: "Here to me from the Magic Mere
Gods of the sunken sea! Queen Morgan calls,
Win her Excalibur!"

MERLIN.

The charm is void.

MORGAN.

Wait for the proof!

MERLIN.

The charm is void, for so
I shield the Sword and England from thy spell.

(*He makes over Excalibur the sign of the cross.*)

KING URIENS.

So now thou'dst prop thy magic with the sign
Of thy Redeemer when the magic fails;

Excalibur

As men deny their Lord to win the cast
And failing, fall on Him for final aid.
So, I defy thee, black blasphemer, so,
I seize my kingdom. From the Magic Mere
Here to me, demons of the sunken sea!
Queen Morgan calls! Win her Excalibur,
Yield me a kingdom!

OMNES.

See, the Sword is fast!

MERLIN.

Morgan le Fay, thy magic lacks the prop
Of righteousness. God gives to whom He will
Knowledge of laws, dominion of unseen,
Unfathomed powers that yet are His alone.
Fools mutter "Magic!" cross themselves aghast,
Granting to God no wisdom save their own,
The which to Him is lispings of a babe,
To Him who made the world, and fixed the laws
Of its endurance. Of His sovereign will,
From time to time, that men may have the light
Wherewith to guide their footsteps through the dark,
He grants some glimpsing vision of that Truth
That in His Being, unto us who stand
As His ambassadors; but know ye well
That whoso wields this wisdom without God
Falls to the nethermost hell.

MORGAN

Where thou art summoned

A little while, mayhap, thou dost prevail,
But swell not with conceit and orgulite,
For thou shalt play the fool. The Sword returns!

Excalbur

(Tumult and confusion without. Enter: SIR KAY and SIRECTOR, followed by many people in great disorder.)

SIR KAY.

Lord Bishop, barons, noble knights, to arms!
King Lot of Orkney and King Carados,
The King of Scotland and a myriad knights
Beat down the gates of London. Like a flood
They surge against the ramparts, cresting high
A breaking wave of death. The people quail
Cowering, kingless, in a kingless land,
With none to lead them. Who is chosen?

MERLIN.

None.

SIR KAY.

Christ help us! for King Lot is at the gates
Claiming the kingdom for Queen Margawse.
Choose!
For God's love, choose!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Stand not upon the form

While dolorous peril menaces the land.
Beat back the tide of treason! Follow Gore,
Or Nentres, Brastias, or any knight
That dares to lead us.

DUKE BRASTIAS.

Follow me afield,

The crown may rest with Uther.

KING NENTRES.

Follow me!

While Merlin keeps the Sword, I gain the crown.

Excalibur

DUKE LUCAS.

Is England won upon the field to-day ?
Stand by me, lords, for I will lead the fight.

OMNES.

Who heads us, Merlin ?

MERLIN.

He who hails the Sword:

None other.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Merlin, art thou leagued with them
That shatter England ?

MERLIN.

No, Sir Launcelot.

The king shall come.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Must we abide thy jest

And stand here waiting while the city falls ?

I hear the kings hale down the grinding gates,

And traitor knights prick through the screaming
streets

To bait us in this trap.

SIR KAY.

Black traitors all,

For God's love choose!

ARCHBISHOP.

We may not. He has sent

Excalibur to England, Joseph's Sword

Left long in Avalon, lost ages since,

And held unransomed in the Magic Mere

While Uther lived. Whoso shall draw the Sword

Is rightwise king of England, and none else.

Excalibur

SIR KAY.

So England falls, for Lot is king anon!

MERLIN.

So England falls not, for the king shall come.

SIR KAY.

To rule a desert waste!

ARCHBISHOP.

God give us aid
As He has given sign. Fall on the Sword,
Barons and knights, who hales him forth is king.

*(The Knights cast themselves about the cross, striving
for the Sword. Enter, ARTHUR.)*

MERLIN.

"Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."

ARTHUR.

Lords of the realm, King Lot is on the walls!
Our knights fall from him like the mangled dogs
That roll before a foaming boar at bay.
Sound thou the onset, herald; lords, to arms!

SIR KAY.

They may not answer, for there is no king.

MERLIN.

Their eyes are blinded, Arthur, by the hilt
Of some fair Sword that holds within the rock
And comes not forth.

Excalibur

ARTHUR. Contend they, sir, for that,
While England falls?

SIR KAY. Aye, boy, while England falls.

ARTHUR.
What shame is this? Shall men dispute a sword
Nor use their own to save a kingdom? Fools!
Sir Kay, I pray thee leave, these women folk
Have softened into children, that a sword
Should blind them, baffle them. Sir, give me leave,
I am Sir Ector's squire, I lack a sword.
But give me leave and I shall lightly win
Knighthood, and fight beside thee: give me leave!

SIR KAY.
And blessing, boy.

MERLIN. The hour is on the stroke.

ARTHUR.
Stand back, ye puling sluggards, is your brawn
Grown fat and futile with your wantonness ?
The devil makes men women, now may God
Make men of boys, England is fallen else!

MERLIN.
 "Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
 Shall reign, Pendragon on Pendragon's throne!"

(The Knights about the cross fall back.)

Excalibur

ARTHUR.

Good Jesu, help me! Come, reluctant Sword!

(He hales the Sword forth, and brandishes it in air.)

OMNES.

The Sword is won, and by a beardless boy!

KING NENTRES.

The Sword is won! Elaine, thy dowry falls.

MORGAN.

The Sword is won! Magician, guard thy craft.

DUKE BRASTIAS.

The Sword is won! What bastard gains the goal?

ARTHUR.

The Sword is won, and lightly, by this arm.
Why stare ye all astonied, good my lords?
Is it so hard to hale a biting blade
From rock that grips it with but half a hand?
Your arms are women's arms, that like your hearts
Halt quaking! Holy father, cry them on,
The toy is mine and I can heave it well.
Now let these whining children draw their swords,
Full heavy for their futile hands. A king
Baleful, black-hearted, hammers at our gates.
I call a challenge, shall I fight alone?

THE COMMONS.

Hail to the King of England!

Excalibur

ARTHUR. Where's the king,
Save Uther's corpse? Nathless a rotting king
Best leads dead warriors.

THE COMMONS. Hail to England's king!
Excalibur is won! Lead us to war!

ARTHUR.
Who wins Excalibur?

MERLIN. Look in thy hand.

ARTHUR.
What Sword is this?

THE COMMONS. **Excalibur!**

ARTHUR. Ye lie!
Lie in your teeth: magician, name this Sword.

MERLIN.
Excalibur.

ARCHBISHOP. Who art thou?

ARTHUR. Arthur.

THE COMMONS. Hail,
Arthur of England, rightwise king and lord!

ARTHUR.
Call ye me king?

Excalibur

THE COMMONS. Aye, King of England.

SIR BREUSE. No!
I challenge thee!

KING NENTRES. I challenge thee!

KING URIENS. And I!

THE BARONS.
King Uther's seed shall reign, no lowborn knave
Propped with the magic of a sorcerer.

THE KNIGHTS.
A squire for England's king? What shame is this?

DUKE BRASTIAS.
No bastard reigns in England!

ARTHUR. Hold thy cry,
Thou fool-mouthed carrion crow! My blood is
clean
And with this Sword I'll prove it. Fair Sir Kay,
Thou art my father: tell him, ere I cleave
His mocking mouth and feed my hungry blade.

THE COMMONS.
Arthur is king: we'll have none other!

ARCHBISHOP. **Peace!**
Merlin, thou art the warder of the Sword,
Speak, if thou know'st an answer. Is this he
That reigns in England as Pendragon's son ?

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Sir Kay, give thou the answer.

SIR KAY.

King and liege,

Upon my knees I swear thee fealty.

SIR ECTOR.

And I, O King of England.

ARTHUR.

How, to me

Thou kneelest father, and thou, Ector? Speak!

Why yield ye homage to the youngest born?

SIR KAY.

For that thou art Pendragon's son, and lord.

THE COMMONS.

King Uther's son!

THE BARONS.

The king's son!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

How is this?

King Uther died, and passed, devoid of heir.

DUKE BRASTIAS.

No bastard reigns in England!

MERLIN.

Cease your clamour,

While from the misty caverns of the night

I raise a vision that shall wash your eyes

Of cloudy sleep. Arthur is rightwise king,

For by his hand Excalibur is drawn

Excalibur

To carve a nation from the wreck of worlds.
Son to King Uther, got on Queen Igraine
Ere yet the Church had blessed the king's great
 love,
Arthur Pendragon holds Pendragon's throne.

DUKE BRASTIAS.
So now I see two bastards in the field,
Arthur Pendragon, Breuse saunce Pité;
Choose, lords and commons, bastards have the day.

THE COMMONS.
Arthur for England!

THE BARONS. We'll no baseborn king!

THE COMMONS.
Arthur for England!

THE KNIGHTS. Out upon his name!

ARTHUR.
Have I no word in this? I win the Sword.
Uther Pendragon was my father. Well,
England is mine. Will any meet my stroke?
Here stand I ready.

SIR BREUSE. If my father's lust
Sowed thine untimely seed in others' fields
Ere yet my day was come, his blood is mine.
"Pendragon's seed shall reign." 'Tis mine or thine,
Brother, I need thy life. Hurl up thy blade!

Excalibur

ARCHBISHOP.

Once more I charge ye under pain of ban
Strike home your swords! Merlin, is there no
choice?

MERLIN.

Aye, between son and bastard; Breuse, thy claim
Is null and void, Arthur is Uther's son.

SIR BREUSE.

And I as well.

MERLIN.

Born out of wedlock. Hear,
Ye men of England. When the king was hot
With fire of love for Igraine, Cornwall's duke
Lay far afield, and Uther had his will.
But ere befell the crowning of his love
The Duke of Cornwall died upon the field
And Uther knew it not. But when Igraine
Grew great with England's hope and gave him birth
Tintagail stood beleaguered of the gods
That Jesu Christ had prisoned in the Mere,
For well they read the rune that gave them word
How on a day should come Pendragon's seed,
The which would lightly cast them deep in hell
And ransom England. By their subtile hands
Was Igraine reft of Arthur, and the child
Hurled downward to the sea. The friendly waves
Softly received him, bore him to my feet
And laid him scathless in my shielding arms;
So then I lightly gave him to Sir Kay
To rear him as his son. Anon, the king

Excalibur

Wedded Igraine, and she was England's queen,
So Arthur stands, Pendragon's lawful son.

ARTHUR.

So stand I, men of England, Uther's son,
And rightwise king from sea to crawling sea.
Swear me allegiance! While we parley here
Like old wives chaffering scandal, Orkney's king
Leaguers the walls of London. When the waves
Rack the tough timbers of a sinking ship
And hell gapes wide where howling breakers yawn,
Do men contend who shall be master? On!
I cry you, On! Arthur for England, On!

KING NENTRES.

Better that England falls than Arthur reigns.

KING URIENS.

Merlin, thy magic wins no men to-day.

SIR BREUSE.

No bastard brother shall command my sword.

KING NENTRES.

Give us a true king, Bishop, or we fail.

SIR KAY.

Stand by me, Ector! King, our swords are thine.

CERTAIN KNIGHTS.

And mine, and mine! King, marshal us for war.

Excalbur

THE COMMONS.

Arthur for England!

A CITIZEN,

Bishop, give us word,
That we may arm us from these traitor knaves.

THE BARONS.

Treason!

KING URIENS. The churls lift hands against our lives!
Thou jester king, hale thou thy nobles home.

ARTHUR.

Shall I fight Lot alone, ye traitor brood?

SIR KAY.

No, for I fight beside thee!

SIR ECTOR.

Sir, and I!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

And I, King Arthur: for that thou art king
My soul gives answer. But wert thou the last
Of villains with a barred and blotted shield
I'd fight beside thee, for thou art a man
Amongst black traitors.

THE COMMONS.

Hail to Launcelot!

MERLIN.

Now do I know that I must work alone
To save this land and give it back to God.

Excalibur

There was a day when wives gave birth to babes
And nurtured them for heroes: not to rats
That waxed to bloated vermin. Fat with spleen,
Yellow with jealousy, ye barter life,
England and honour for your belching pride.
What would ye have?

THE BARONS. A proof, foul Merlin, proof!

ARTHUR.

And ye shall have it, if the Lord will speak
In otherwise than by a thunderbolt
To hurl ye back to hell, whence came ye forth
To do disworship to your chivalry.

(He kneels before King Uther's bier.)

O thou, that gav'st me life, thou king of men,
My father, hear me! From that awful land
When thou art walking with the saints of God
Hear me and save thy kingdom. Speak to these
Thy liegemen; tell them that I am thy son,
Nor knave nor bastard, but great England's king.
Save thou thy people!

*(The dead king lifts his hand, removes the crown
from his brow, and with it crowns ARTHUR.)*

OMNES.

Look! Christ Jesu! Look!

ARCHBISHOP.

To Thee, O Christ, and to Thee, Lord of Hosts,
Be praise forever!

Excalibur

MERLIN. Are ye satisfied,
That hounded God until He gave ye proof?

DUKE LUCAS.
It is enough. With all my men at arms
I yield thee, king, liege love and loyalty.

ARTHUR.
My honour take for guerdon. King of Gore,
Dost thou confess me rightwise overlord ?

MORGAN.
Deny him, king, and thou shalt wear the crown.

KING URIENS.
Shall Gore be vassal to a changeling, crowned
By sorcery with England's coronet?
I solemnly deny thee.

ARTHUR. Go thy ways;
Anon I'll meet thee in the reeking field,
And on thy body prove thy treason. Speak,
Nentres of Garlot!

KING NENTRES. I have spoken, fool!
Now comes the deed. I join with Scotland's king,
With Gore and Carados. The stolen crown
Falls from thy head ere sunset.

ARTHUR. Dost thou deny me? Brastias,

Excalibur

DUKE BRASTIAS. I am sworn to fight
For England, and I stand beside thee, king,
If that thou art. I tell thee to thy face
If, when the fight is won and England free,
I find thee but a crownèd bastard, then
By God, I'll hurl thee headlong from the throne
And ask no priest to shrive me of my sin!

ARTHUR.
Well spoken, Brastias: give me thy hand,
And if Pendragon's blood flows not to-day
From out my sundered veins, I give thee leave
To snatch the crown I reached no hand to win.
Garlot and Gore, lightly avoid our sight
Until we meet ye, traitors, in the field.
Now, herald, sound the onset. Knights, to arms!
Arthur for England!

*(Flourish of trumpets. The Barons and Knights kneel
before ARTHUR, swearing allegiance.)*

SIR BREUSE. But not yet for me.
Queen Morgan, art thou helpless in the blaze
Of Merlin's mockery? Hast thou no spell
To blast this folly?

MORGAN. Wait a little, Breuse;
I know no spell to match with marching time
To wash men's minds of madness. Follow me,
Wait patiently. Thou know'st I love thee, knight,
And I do swear the crown shall clinch thy brow
When Arthur rots.

Excalibur

KING NENTRES. My lord of Gore,
Why dally we among these daffish dupes?
The road is open for us. Follow, knights!
We fight with Orkney, Arthur fights alone.

*(Exeunt KING NENTRES, KING URIENS, SIR BREUSE,
and certain of the Knights.)*

MERLIN.
Bright in the blazing zenith flames the sun
Of England's dawn. King, cry the onset!

ARTHUR. Come,
Liegemen of England's crown; for England's king,
And so for England, let your impatient swords
Menace the sun with lightnings; let the horns
In brazen clamour hurl the word abroad
That England's king brooks no disloyalty
Of prince or peasant, while his faithful knights
Die, if God wills, but suffer no disdain
To fall upon their lord who is their land.
War waits us; England watches; God has heard.

*(Exeunt ARTHUR, the Barons, Knights, and Commons,
singing the war song. The ARCHBISHOP and Monks
re-enter the cathedral chanting, "Te Deum lauda-
mus." MERLIN remains standing on the steps of the
cross, regarding MORGAN, who remains by Uther's
bier, gazing on him with defiance.)*

Excalbur

WAR SONG

Sun, see us,
Wind, hear us,
Earth, feel us hurling on.
God, free us,
Who near us
brings foemen whirling on.

Christ, guide us,
saints, arm us,
Lady Mary, lead us now!
None abide us
hurt or harm us:
King and kindred need us now!

MERLIN.

Pendragon passes, now Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.
A kingdom passes, now a kingdom's king
Shall raise a kingdom for the King of kings.

Curtain.

SCENE II. *Carlion. The crown of a low, wooded hill: the royal pavilion in the midst. In front SIR PELLEAS, lying wounded, ETTARD nursing him. Around are other Knights with Monks dressing their wounds. Sunset: the sound of battle without. Enter at a galop, SIR TOR.*

SIR PELLEAS.

How goes the fight?

Excalibur

SIR TOR. As some enormous flood
That thunders down the mountain, rolling on
Inexorable.

SIR PELLEAS. Stay, for God's love, Tor,
And ease my wounds with word of victory.
The king prevails?

SIR TOR. Thou speakest as a fool!
The boy fights even as St. Michael fought,
And rebel kings fall headlong from his stroke
As fell the devil's angels. Stay me not,
I ride with word for Launcelot. (*Exit*)

SIR PELLEAS. Sir Tor!
He goes, and all my wounds burst out afresh.
Ettard, I follow him! Give me my shield!

ETTARD.
Nay, sweet, fair knight, bethink thee of thy case,
Thou could'st not lift a sword; see how thine arm
Turns rebel to thine whole, unwounded will.
Abide a little.

SIR PELLEAS. Aye, and house me here
Like any whining churl, the while the fight
Roars loud and lusty, howling in mine ear
To rise and follow. Give me drink! My shield!
Ettard, bring me my shield! If I must die
At least I'll die where steel is biting steel,
Not in a woman's arms.

Excalibur

ETTARD. Thou shalt not die,
For here I hold thee, maugre thy headlong will.
See, dear my lord, thou canst not rive the clasp
Of my two arms, and wouldst thou lead the fight ?
Content thyself.

SIR PELLEAS. Out on the scurvy knave
That did me this disworship!

(Enter DUKE LUCAS, wounded.)

Who is come,
Forspent, and gaping with such grimly wounds ?
Sir knight, what word ?

DUKE LUCAS. The day is well-nigh won,
But for this vile and most felonious wound
I needs must lose the glory of the end.
Certes, the villain that did me this trick
Fell, cleft in halves unto the saddle bow,
But all too late.

SIR PELLEAS. Look thou to him, Ettard,
He falls. Sir monk, come hither: look afield,
Canst thou see ought?

MONK. Naught, save a whirling storm
Of dust that rolls in dun and sullen clouds
Along the meadows. Think not of the battle
But of thyself: perchance thou art to die.
Art thou assoiled?

Excalibur

SIR PELLEAS. Death lingers not for me,
Do as I bid thee: tell me of the fight.

MONK.
The cloud is broken: towards the sinking sun
A thousand — nay, ten thousand men drive on
Dismayed, disordered.

SIR PELLEAS. Whose the banner? Speak!

MONK.
I mark no banner, but the shields are round.

SIR PELLEAS.
St. George, an altar for thee, 'tis the Scots!
What else?

MONK. The dust is lifted like a fog:
East, north, and south men hurl across the plain,
And on their flanks swords flash as lightning. Ha!
I mark the crest of Garlot.

SIR PELLEAS. Fleeing, monk?

MONK.
Aye, like a champion coursing down the lists,
So fast.

SIR PELLEAS. The king, canst see the king?

Excalbur

MONK. Not yet.
Hold! by the Mass, the fight is at an end.
A mighty shout comes winging on the wind,
And down the field the dragon-crested knights
Come spurring wonderly.

SIR PELLEAS. God save the king!

DUKE LUCAS.
What cry is that? Quick, lift me higher, girl!
Who says the fight is won?

MONK. The king, the king!
The pageant opens, and I see him ride
With whirling sword before the shouting knights;
God save King Arthur!

SIR PELLEAS. Grip me round the waist
And lift me, so, good monk: I see the king!

OMNES.
God save King Arthur!
Hail, Pendragon!
Hail!

(Enter: KING ARTHUR, SIR LAUNCELOT, SIR TOR,
SIR ECTOR, SIR KAY, DUKE BRASTIAS, and
Knights, mounted.)

KING ARTHUR.
So fight the saints for England, and the tide
Of treason that rose darkling on the land

Excalibur

To 'whelm Pendragon's House and heritage,
Is halted, broken, utterly dispersed
In shallow ripples sobbing o'er the fields.
Now soars the Dragon to the shouting sky,
Exalted high, unchallenged, undismayed;
England is free, for God has won the day!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

By thee, King Arthur, for thy royal hand
Struck down the enemies of England's crown
As I thought not to see the like thereof.
Thine was the victory, for since he rode,
The king, thy father, in the latest fight,
And heaved his mighty sword, with palsied arm
Made iron by the grace of England's God,
Such prowess has not been.

SIR PELLEAS.

King Arthur, hail!

God save the man that saved a kingdom!

OMNES.

Hail!

God save the king!

KING ARTHUR.

Give me no honour, lords;

What brought I, save the brawn of rugged arms?

If ye would glorify the holy thing

That won the day, look on this awful Sword

That hews untrammelled victory, whoe'er

May hap to wield him. Hail Excalibur,

And heap your thanks on Merlin, not on me.

Excalibur

SIR LAUNCELOT.

On thee and Merlin and Excalibur
All England casts the tribute of her praise,
But thou art first for that thou art the king,
And he that climbs to clutch the royal crown
From off thy riven helmet, from this day
Must reckon first on dolorous debate
With every man that backed thee in the field.

SIR BRASTIAS.

And first with me; I want the trick of words,
That am for fighting, not for parliament,
But I confess thee king. My sword is thine;
What Brastias gives he takes not back again.

KING ARTHUR.

As I am king, I pledge Pendragon's name
Thou gainest, Brastias, no cause from me
To ask it ever.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Come, victorious king.

Avoid thy steed for easing of thy limbs,
The while thou dost refresh thy taxèd strength
With meat and drink: we fight no more to-day.
Rest on thy victory.

KING ARTHUR.

Give me thine hand,

And for a narrow space I'll halt me here
The while my hounds shall harry to their holes
The crownèd wolves of treason. Fair Sir Tor,
Look thou that all the knights and men at arms

Excalibur

Be well disposed. Of thy good grace, Sir Kay,
I pray thee see that all who are on live,
Yet sorely wounded, have such ministry
As fits their case; and thou, Sir Launcelot,
Hold thou by me: I need thy councilment.

*(Exeunt all but KING ARTHUR, SIR LAUNCELOT, DUKE
LUCAS, and Monk.)*

DUKE LUCAS.

Death frights me not, now I have seen the sun
Go down upon this wondrous victory.
Lift me, good monk: king, I am sore bested
With searching wounds. I may not see thee fight
Again for England, but if I must die
I die thy vassal.

KING ARTHUR.

'Tis Duke Lucas's voice
That hails me from a mask of sorry wounds!
The sun of victory is in eclipse
If thou art sinking towards a grievous end.
Grip hard upon the hilt of life, my lord,
And thou shalt brandish it against the foe
On many fields ere yet thy day is done.

DUKE LUCAS.

I fear me, king, my sun is on the rim
Of death's horizon. Let it go: content
Am I to follow, now the field is won.

KING ARTHUR.

That shalt thou not. Good father, guard him well,

Excalibur

And thou shalt be an abbot for thy pains.
Would well my Merlin followed in the field,
For he is skilled in cunning medicine.
Has any seen him ?

(Exit DUKE LUCAS and Monk.)

SIR LAUNCELOT. Aye, King Arthur, horsed
Upon a frightful steed as black as hell,
That gnashed with foaming teeth and bloody jaws
Against the horses whilst his master fought:
A baleful spectacle.

KING ARTHUR. Did Merlin fight ?
Meseemed his weapons were the fateful stars,
His hauberk fearsome magic.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Aye, he fought,
And wonderly, for whereso'er he rode
The traitors opened from him in amaze,
Nor could endure the lightning of his eye.

KING ARTHUR.
'Tis very strange: but marvels fall as rain
Each day in England. Tell me, Launcelot,
The while we drink and quench the flame of fight,
Bore I myself as fits Pendragon's son
There in the press of battle ?

SIR LAUNCELOT. Good my lord,
St. Michael in the charge of heavenly hosts
Against the devil fought not in such wise.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

Nay, answer not with any courtier's tongue,
I crave no words of fawning flattery.
Speak as a provèd knight unto a squire
That feutred maiden spear along the lists
And rides victorious. Was it rightly done?
Pardie! I know not.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Aye, 'twas bravely done.

And thou hast routed, not alone the foe,
Orkney and Carados, the King of Scots,
The traitor Garlot — God alone can tell
The number of the kings — but more than all
Thou hast o'erthrown the last of them that mocked
Against thy majesty.

KING ARTHUR.

God grant 'tis so,

But flame stamped out oft bursts again anew.
I would the day were ten good years ago
When I did gain the crown.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Ten years of years

Could fix it no more firmly on thy brow.
Pendragon's blood confirms Pendragon's seed.

KING ARTHUR.

How runs the rune, Sir knight? "Pendragon's seed
Shall slay Pendragon:"

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Nay, "Pendragon's seed

Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne."

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.
I think me of the other.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Why, my lord?

KING ARTHUR.
For that the fire of fight within my veins
Is fading, and the dark of coming things
Looms close upon me. Tell me, Launcelot,
Woulds't thou be king?

SIR LAUNCELOT. Aye, sir, an' thou wert not.

KING ARTHUR.
Take thou the crown!

SIR LAUNCELOT. What jest is this, King Arthur?

KING ARTHUR.
No jest, good Launcelot, as I do find.
Seven days I've called it mine, and on each day
It waxed a pound in weight. A weary thing,
An irksome, weary thing, a royal crown;
Yet men would sell their souls to feel it cling
Around their brows, and hate it when 'twas won.

(Enter MERLIN at back.)

SIR LAUNCELOT.
This sadness likes me not.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. 'Tis gone again.
A passing mood begotten of the mist
That blots the future: think no more of it.
My Launcelot, a most untoward thing
Is this that meets me: for a maiden joust
Fierce war with mighty kings, and for the prize
A crown and kingdom.

MERLIN. It is well contrived
To match the marvels that shall follow, king.
Upon the deep foundation thou hast laid
This day, shall rise a fabric such as men
Saw not, nor shall again. Great England's crown
Shall widen in its circuit till it rings
An empire that would blind with sore amaze
High Cæsar thronèd in the crowding walls
Of awful Rome. For such high destiny
Most meet it is the crown come on this wise.

KING ARTHUR.
I give thee greeting, Merlin; knight thou art
And no more wizard, but a man of war,
Therefore, Childe Merlin art thou. Gentle knight,
How like ye warfare? Were the stars unkind
That thou should'st flout them for a naked sword?
Nathless I thank thee, for upon the oath
Of chivalry, I do believe the day
Was won by thee.

MERLIN. Mock me no jest, Sir king,
For years and wisdom cannot curb the hand

Excalibur

That itches for a sword when steel and steel
Are clanging music in the listening ear
No more of that; thou art anointed king
With traitors' blood: the chrism of my lord
Of Canterbury can avail no more.
So now, to horse, and ride for Camelot!

KING ARTHUR.

And let the traitor foxes find their holes,
Nor scourge them for their treason?

MERLIN.

Let them be.

Already on their borders press the foe,
And flame and slaughter hotly call them home;
They may not hinder thee. The war is done,
Now statecraft clamours for thee.

KING ARTHUR.

I am fain

To harry them a little — Ha! Sir Tor,
What tidings of the chase?

(Enter SIR TOR.)

SIR TOR.

The sky is clear.

Like fleeting mist before the rising sun,
The foe has melted into little clouds
That, driven by the wind of victory,
Scud aimless, formless, blind with blanching fear.
Shall we pursue?

MERLIN.

Bethink thee well, King Arthur.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

Call back the knights, we rest here till the dawn;
To-morrow we will lie at Camelot
And call a Parliament.

(Exit SIR TOR.)

MERLIN.

'Tis well resolved.
Thou hast approved thy right to wear the crown,
Upon the field. Prove thou the sceptre thine,
The sword of justice and the golden orb,
As thou shalt prove them in thy Parliament,
And thou art king indeed.

(Enter SIR KAY.)

SIR KAY.

My lord, a vassal
But lately fighting 'gainst thy majesty
Is come, repentant of his evil mood,
To do thee worship.

KING ARTHUR.

We will greet him kindly;
Bring him before us.

MERLIN.

King, be on thy guard!
There's more of treason than the bearing arms
Against thee in the field.

KING ARTHUR.

I am the King
Of England,— all of England,— and I hold
No hatred 'gainst a vassal that repents
Of treason, asking pardon.

Excalbur

(Enter KING URIENS and QUEEN MORGAN.)
King of Gore,
And thou, our sister, welcome!

MERLIN (*aside*). Loathly witch,
I scent thy craft in this! Now Merlin, watch,
For danger climbs the steps of Arthur's throne.

MORGAN.
King Arthur, here we yield us to thy grace.
Thou art approvèd king: in vassalage
We humbly kneel and swear liege loyalty.

KING ARTHUR.
Thou art our sister, Morgan, but not king:
So let him speak.

KING URIENS. I do confess the proof
And hail thee King of England.

KING ARTHUR. On thy knees
Thou shalt swear fealty at Camelot
To-morrow. Seneschal, into thy charge
We give the King of Gore, and Morgan, queen,
And sister unto England.

MERLIN. Guard them shrewdly,
Sir Kay, but look thou to the lady
With double cunning.

MORGAN. So, the sorcerer
Still props the throne! We do confess the king,
But not his master, Merlin.

Excalbur

MERLIN.

As thou shalt!

(*Enter: SIR ECTOR and DUKE BRASTIAS.*)

SIR ECTOR.

My lord, Sir Ulfius is well returned
From hounding Lot adown the western wind,
And with him bruit of war hard here at hand
By Rience, King of Wales, 'gainst thine ally,
Leodegrance, King of Cameliard.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

How say'st thou, sir?

SIR ARTHUR.

Is Rience loose again?
I hate him well, the wolfish King of Wales.
A most felonious, false-hearted knave,
While King Leodegrance held by our House
In hearty friendship. How says Ulfius
Touching the battle, Ector?

SIR ECTOR.

King Rience
Prevails most wonderly. Leodegrance
Is prisoned in his castle, close beset
By howling hoards of lewd and savage men
That cease not from the siege. The king is lost
If succour comes not swiftly.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Jesu Christ,
Hold back the hasty sun!

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. How say ye, lords?
We are forefoughten, but the peril looms
Close on Leodegrance. Shall we essay
This brave adventure?

DUKE BRASTIAS. Wait until the morrow,
We cannot fight with bodies that cry out
For mercy. March at dawn; Leodegrance
Must hold a little longer.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Good my lord,
In God's name grant this boon that on my knees
I ask of thee! March for Cameliard
This night, this very hour! Thou knowest not
That all my life is prisoned with the king,
And even now, mayhap, the black Rience
Is bursting through the walls to hale them forth,
Thine ally, and the lady Guenever
That I do love. King Arthur, give no heed
To cautious council, but be moved by me
If thou dost love me.

KING ARTHUR. Fair Sir Launcelot,
Thy love leaps with my liking. Sound the horns,
And strike the camp as lightly as ye may.
On to Cameliard!

(*Trumpets without. Enter many Knights.*)

SIR LAUNCELOT. My life is thine,
King Arthur, ask it of me when ye will.
On to Cameliard!

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. My lords, my knights,
My hardy men of England, King Rience,
The which we loath since he doth hate us well
And holds against us, strikes Leodegrance,
Our sworn ally. Around the castle walls
A rabble army all disworshipful
Howls loud for blood and booty. We are knights,
Sworn by our knighthood ever to afford
All aid to them that suffer evil hap.
For high adventure march we forth to-night
Into Cameliard. To-morrow's sun
Shall see us well discharged of our devoir,
And Rience beaten back into his lair.
Let honour stay our hunger, ease our limbs,
Here rest we not. Cry, "Death to King Rience!"
On, for the worship of our chivalry!

*(Exeunt, leaving MERLIN standing before the pavilion,
KING URIENS and QUEEN MORGAN at back. The
stage is quite dark.)*

MERLIN *(seating himself beneath the pavilion).*
All passeth as an ordered pageantry,
And without hinderance the great design
That gathered perfect form within my brain
Takes shape and substance. So I stand with God,
Who did conceive the project of a world
And give it being, in that I may weave
A splendid fabric where the warp and woof
Are little lives that, like a tangled web
Of knotting threads, would break and haul awry
Did I not play the part of destiny.

Exaltbur

MORGAN.

See where the grim magician sits him down
Upon the throne of his poor puppet king
In guise of majesty. 'Tis well devised;
He is the king!

KING URIENS. And must we bear with this
That hold the throne of right from Queen Igraine,
Nor lift a hand against this trickery?

MORGAN.

Thy sword is by thee, strike for England now!

KING URIENS.

The king is gone.

MORGAN.

The king is in thy reach!

KING URIENS.

How mean ye, Merlin?

MORGAN.

Hush! he speaks again.

MERLIN.

What man is there would crouch beneath a crown
And be the target of a thousand swords,
When he might stand unseen behind the throne
To marshal armies, overthrow estates,
And fashion kingdoms by his sovereign will ?
There lies the potency of royalty
Hid in a little word. Prevailing will,
The essence of the Godhead, and the sign
That shows in man the imagery of God.

Excalibur

KING URIENS (*aside*).

Shall I not strike him now ?

MORGAN.

Unless thine arm
Is palsied with thy years. Give me the sword!

KING URIENS.

I am no dotard, toppling on the brim
Of black eternity.

MORGAN.

Then strike thou home!

(*URIENS approaches MERLIN from the back of the pavilion and lifts his sword to stab him.*)

MERLIN.

What menace threatens me ?

(*He rises: URIENS strikes him from behind, the sword turning blunted from the stroke.*)

Fool! I kill thee not,
For that thou art none other than the tool
Of one that is hell's proxy in the fight
Betwixt us. Morgan, lightly stand thou forth
The while I give thee council.

MORGAN.

Mark me, then,
For like a bloodhound nosing down the trail
I follow thee, Sir Merlin, to the end.

MERLIN.

With weapon such as this ? I would not move
An hand's breath from my course for fear thereof.

Excalibur

Thy wit forsakes thee, Morgan, dost thou think
To cope with Merlin? Marshal in their might
The quaking spirits of the Magic Mere
And hurl them on me, they shall fright me not
Nor let me from my labour. I am he
That God has made His deputy on earth.
I am incarnate will, and I abide
Forever scathless. Thou art futile craft
And this thy tool is blind and senseless force.
Shall either match me that am perfect will
Untrammelled, unconditioned? Get thee gone
And sink thy deep dishonour in the sea,
Nor sally forth to mock me with the jest
Of potent hinderance. I am thy lord,
For I am will and wisdom, and I stand
Unhampered of thine idle enmity
Until my task is ended: until God
Reigns absolute in England, and the day
Of righteousness shall lighten on the land.
My will prevails: content thee with thy doom.

Curtain.

SCENE III. *Cameliard. Before the castle of KING
LEODEGRANCE. Enter: KING RIENCE, mounted, and with
him Knights, Men-at-arms, and Bowmen. Before dawn.*

KING RIENCE.

Now breaks the day of triumph to our arms!
Too long, my men of Wales, Leodegrance,
Chased like a fox to cover, flouts our might

Excalbur

And holds his haughty castle that uprears :
A menace to our kingship. Once again
Assail the dragon's nest, and hale him forth
To die disworshipfully. Sound the horns,
And hurl against the rocky fastness, doomed,
Ere yet the laggard sun lifts on the world,
To fall in ragged splinters round the king
That thinks to halt Rience with stony walls.
This day is mine. Good herald, sound the horns!

(*Trumpets. Enter above: KING LEODEGRANCE and Knights.*)

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Hold back thy men, Rience, and give thy tongue
To gentle parley, ere the dreadful shock
Of grimly war distains the breaking day.
Declare thy quarrel, that with savage arms
Thou wagest battle 'gainst my kingdom.

KING RIENCE.

So!

The orgulous monarch turns to mellow speech
When warfare helps him not. Leodegrance,
I fight thee for that I do loathe thy name
All blazonèd with epithets of praise,
For that thou dost revile me for a knave,
For that thou art a vassal to the fool
Uther Pendragon.

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Uther lieth dead:

Pendragon dieth never. I am sworn
In loyal friendship to that royal House,

Excalibur

Wherefore I die if God so wills my death,
But never shall forget my knightly oath.

KING RIENCE.

Why then, thou diest, king. Cameliard
I hold in fee before the lifting sun
Hangs in mid-heaven. Archers, bend your bows!

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Once more, King Rience, answer my appeal;
What then befalls me if I swing the gates
And yield my castle?

KING RIENCE.

Four flame-branded steeds
To rend thy carcase! This for thee, Sir king,
And for thy squeaking women, each a man,
A stalwart wolf of Wales, to dry their tears
And give them joy before their death to-night.
For me thy scornful daughter, Guenever;
So now, swing wide thy gates!

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Thou damnèd cur,
Hell howls to grip thee in its grinning jaws!
An' we must die, we die not by thy hand.
The castle thou dost covet is a tomb
Heaped high with corpses, if ye breach the walls
In black despite of God.

KING RIENCE.

A brave reply,
Thou wintry-pated miscreant. Think well
Before thou holdest longer. Strike a blow
Once more to-day against my majesty

Excalibur

And I will crucify thee on the walls
And shame thy daughter in thy dying eyes!

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Bring forth thy legions out of yawning hell
And ring my castle with consuming flame
Until it melts, and pours in blazing streams
Along the screaming meadows. I endure,
And flaunt Pendragon's banner in thy teeth!

KING RIENCE.

See, wolves of Wales, the dragon, drunk with dole,
Crawls fearsomely upon his battlements
Intent to stay my hand. Give me a bow!
By God, I'll nail the dotard to his shield
With this my mighty arm. Give me a bow!

*(Trumpets. The ramparts above fill with bowmen.
RIENCE's force bring scaling ladders and mount and
fight on the walls.)*

KING LEODEGRANCE.

God fights with us against unrighteous Wales.
Hurl on them, knights, the day is lost not yet.

KING RIENCE.

Heave up the catapult and breach the walls!
Bring in the ram and split the guarding gates!
One little hour, my wolves, and ye shall lie
With gluttoned maws, beneath the drowsy shade
Of blooming orchards.

Excalibur

(Enter: KING NENTRES of Garlot, mounted.)

KING NENTRES. Hail, great King Rience!
Nentres of Garlot am I, and I come
To fight with thee if thou wilt league with me
Against the wittol that has filched the crown
Of England, backed by scurvy sorcery.

KING RIENCE.
Marshal your shields along the leaping ram
For cover of the men. So, now essay!
Garlot, I need thee not, but for the hate
I bear Pendragon I will stand with thee.
Back, men, and to't again! How came ye here,
Nentres of Garlot?

KING NENTRES. From a grim debate
With traitor knights that back the bastard king.

KING RIENCE.
That did thee hurt? Gramercy for thine aid!
Ha, well sped! Sirrah, to the catapult,
And bid the captain load with blazing brands;
Once more against the gates!

KING NENTRES. Nay, King Rience,
The rebels fled along the hiding night
Distraught with dole.

KING RIENCE. Crave thou no booty, king;
This castle is for me and for my men;
Ye gain no part thereof.

Excalibur

KING NENTRES. Nor ask the same.
For guerdon give me aid to overthrow
Pendragon.

KING RIENCE. Not for guerdon, but for hate.
Thou winnest worship not of me to-day
That standest prating while we toil amain.
Get thee within the fight!

(Enter: A Welch Knight.)

How now, thou fool?
What sears thy face with fear?

A KNIGHT. My lord, my lord!
The forest turns to grim and armed knights
Fierce, dragon-crested, raging on our flank
With savage fury!

KING RIENCE. Damn thee, traitor king!
Is this thy work?

KING NENTRES. I swear I knew it not!
God's wounds, it is King Arthur! We are done:
The heavenly host 'gainst him may not prevail.
Save thou thyself, King Rience!

(Exit.)

KING RIENCE. Turn, my knights!
Give o'er the siege until we stay the fool
That hinders us when our enhungered fangs
Are at the quarry's throat. Come on, my wolves,
And make a mock of England!

Excalibur

(*Exeunt, KING RIENCE and the Welsh Knights.*
Enter, above: KING LEODEGRANCE.)

KING LEODEGRANCE. Jesu Christ,
Thy hand is stretched to save! A miracle!
My men, a miracle! Who does God will?
Mine eyes are lightless and I scarce can see.
Tell me, Sir knight, who by the grace of Christ
Has turned the tide of battle?

A KNIGHT. All is hid
Within a rolling cloud. A myriad men
As they were like a plague of summer gnats
Fall on Rience.

KING LEODEGRANCE. Canst thou not mark their crest?

A KNIGHT.
By all the saints, 'tis England aids us, king!
The dragon flashes through the seething storm,
Pendragon comes!

OMNES. God save Pendragon's name,
All hail, great England, hail! Pendragon comes!

(*Enter: English and Welsh Knights fighting. They
pass across the stage.*)

KING LEODEGRANCE.
Down to the port and swing the labouring gates!
On, for the worship of Cameliard,
And smite the wolves of Wales in open field!
God wins the day, Cameliard is free.

Excalibur

(Exit: from above, KING LEODEGRANCE and the Knights. The gates open. Enter: From the castle, many men, who exit shouting,--)

OMNES.

Leodegrance, Pendragon, and set on!

(Enter, mounted: KING ARTHUR and KING RIENCE, fighting.)

KING ARTHUR.

This day wipes out the shame on Uther's name,
Rience, thou diest!

KING RIENCE.

Damn thee, villain!

(Enter, above: GUENEVER, YSED, and other women.)

GUENEVER.

See!

Rience is mastered by a doughty knight.
God save thee, sir, strike down the mocking knave!

KING ARTHUR.

My worship to ye, gentle ladies. King,
Yield thee a recreant!

KING RIENCE.

Not if thou wert God!

Guard thyself!

GUENEVER.

Sweet Ysed, it is the king
That reigns in Uther's stead, for see, the crown
Clings 'round the Dragon.

Excalibur

YSED. Oh, the king is slain!
He falls along his steed!

(Enter: SIR LAUNCELOT. *He rushes against RIENCE. ARTHUR reels in the saddle.*)

GUENEVER. God sends him succour.
What favour flutters round the bruised helm
Of him that presses hotly on Rience?
My favour! Launcelot, 'tis Launcelot!

(RIENCE *falls.*)

YSED.
He falls, King Rience falls!

KING ARTHUR. Nay, Launcelot,
Thou dost unkindly by me. I was fain
To win this worship.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Art thou wounded, king?

KING ARTHUR.
Whole, hardy, and unscathed. 'Twas but a blow
That blotted reason for a little space.
The day is won!

GUENEVER. God save thee, gentle king,
Thou hast delivered us! Sir Launcelot,
Look hitherward, dost know me, Launcelot?

Excalibur

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Aye, lady, as I know the favour twined
Around my helm, and I do love thee well.

GUENEVER.

Hold thou thy station! Follow me, Ysed,
While with the king my father we do come
To lay our worship before England's feet.
(*Exeunt.*)

KING ARTHUR.

Why now I win a fight and thou a maid !
Give me thy guerdon and I yield thee mine.
How say'st thou, Launcelot ?

SIR LAUNCELOT.

My noble king,
Were all the world within thy proffered hand
I'd cast it from me, resting well content
With that I have.

(*Enter: from the castle KING LEODEGRANCE, GUENEVER, YSED, and many Knights and Ladies. Enter from the field: SIR KAY, SIR ECTOR, SIR TOR, DUKE BRASTIAS, and many Knights. KING ARTHUR dismounts.*)

OMNES.

God save great England's king!

KING LEODEGRANCE.

Where is the servant of the living God
Come down from Heaven to save Cameliard ?
Let me behold him.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. King Leodegrance,
Arthur Pendragon is Pendragon still,
And holds by them King Uther loved withal;
Give me thy hand.

KING LEODEGRANCE. Upon my palsied knees
I thank thee, King of England.

KING ARTHUR. God forbend
That thou shouldst kneel, that art so reverend
And white with years.

KING LEODEGRANCE. My daughter Guenever,
Do homage unto England!

KING ARTHUR. Lady fair,
My homage unto thee in place thereof,
For, by mine oath of knighthood, fair thou art
And matched by none in all the crowded world;
Wherefore take thou my worship. Launcelot,
I pray thee, come! Sir knight, the crown is thine
Upon condition.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Sir, I crave it not,
But only this.

(He kneels, kissing GUENEVER's hand.)

KING ARTHUR. Why now the sun is gone,
And victory is but a hollow name.
My brother of Cameliard, we two
Will sit forlorn about the patient board

Excalbur

And talk full sadly of the emptiness
Of martial triumph. Who would win a fight
And find the guerdon gained the fame thereof,
While others reap the booty ? Come, my lords,
We will within, and while we ease us well,
Drink deep the health of King Leodegrance
And of the flower of women, Guenever.

Curtain.

Excalbur

ACT II

SCENE I.—*Camelot. The shore of the Magic Mere, seen close at hand through tall, slim trees. In the midst a silken pavilion open on all sides. DAME COLUMBE, GUENEVER, YSED, and ETTARD; SIR LAUNCELOT, SIR PELLEAS, SIR TOR, and SIR KAY, lying on the grass.*

COLUMBE.

Sweet damozel, sing me that song again :
Full dolorous it is and wet with tears,
Yet glad withal, as one should weep with joy
Of life that is too sweet with brimming bliss.

GUENEVER.

Nay, Lady Columbe, pray you let it pass,
A true thing said rings false if said again.
Sang I not true ?

COLUMBE.

Aye, Guenever, in faith
Ye sang me true, and even as my heart
Calls gently when the night is very still.
How think ye, lords ?

SIR KAY.

Dame Columbe, prythee say
If still my beard be grizzled, for the maid
Sang me so softly of the sweet, dead days,
When all my blood leaped like a noble stag
Through golden, gleaming forests, that meseemed
Twoscore of years had vanished with her song;
I was a squire again.

Excalibur

ETTARD. As thou art now,
Sir Kay, and shall be ever, for the years
Are not for thee; the silver in thy beard
Turns traitor to the fire within thy blood.

SIR KAY.
Out on the knave that gives me evil name!
Sir beard, I charge thee with high treason —

COLUMBE. **Hold!**
 Wreak not thy vengeance on a silly rogue
 That deals in futile lies that none believes.
 Thy heart, my Kay, gives answer to the lie:
 Sir Tor, liked thou the song?

SIR TOR. As sinners love
The hand that shrives them, makes them clean for
God.
Fair lady, while ye sang I saw the wind
Grow bright with angels leaning near to learn
The why men seem to love this paltry world
More than the courts of heaven.

COLUMBE. Well said, Sir Tor.
Speak, Pelleas, what saw ye in the song?

SIR PELLEAS.
I saw the milky blossoms of the May,
Ripe roses bursting into honeyed bloom,
And every flower that burgeons on the bough
When summer winds are warm with summer love;
And all these melted, as the music moved,
Into one face ——

Excalibur

COLUMBE. That thou didst call ?

SIR PELLEAS. Ettard.

COLUMBE.
 Fair sir, thou speakest as a loyal knight.
 Now Launcelot, hast thou no word of praise ?

LAUNCELOT.
 No word that I may say.

COLUMBE. False, craven knight,
 Dost yield thee recreant ?

SIR LAUNCELOT. With all my heart.

COLUMBE.
 Then kneel and sue for mercy.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Guenever,
 Unhorsed and vanquished, wounded unto death
 Kneeling I crave thy mercy. Give me life,
 Nor send me back into the dolorous dark
 Whence came I forth to find thee. Let me live
 Thy loyal knight, and by Sir Jesu's wounds
 I swear to yield true service unto thee,
 And stainless worship.

GUENEVER. Fair Sir Launcelot,
 I pray thee, of thy knighthood, do not kneel.
 How should I give thee life, that art so strong
 And lusty ? Wit ye well, most gentle knight,
 Thy life lies not within my holding hands.

Excalbur

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Of thy good grace, I pray thee, reach them forth
Close clasped before my sight. O Guenever,
Within the tender cup of these white hands
That I do worship as the Holy Grail,
Thou holdest that which is too poor a thing
For me to cast beneath thy slender feet,
Yet is it all I have, for 'tis my heart.

GUENEVER.

And will it break if I uncloze my hands
And let it fall ?

SIR LAUNCELOT. Aye, lady, it will break.

GUENEVER.

I will essay!

SIR LAUNCELOT. I pray thee!

GUENEVER.

See, 'tis fallen.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

And it is shattered in such grievous wise
It may not beat again.

GUENEVER.

Poor, broken heart!

But if I lift it from the couching grass
And nurse and warm it in my heart of hearts,—

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Then like the phoenix from the fawning flame
It will arise, transfigured with new life.

Excalbur

GUENEVER.

Now wit ye well, I know not what to do.
See how it lies like some soft, wounded bird
Among the primrose buds that nestle close.
Certes, I fain would warm it in my breast,
But I do fear me it would change, mayhap,
Into a serpent.

SIR LAUNCELOT. Never, by my sword,
And by the faith I owe my knighthood!

(Enter, on the banks of the lake: MORGAN LE FAY.)

COLUMBE.

See!

Where through the quaking trees Queen Morgan
goes,
Ill hap betides us if she lifts her eyes
And looks upon us.

YSED. Jesu, mercy! Why?
I do beseech thee, why?

COLUMBE.

Thou art not wise,

Ysed, in all the lore of Arthur's court,
Else wouldst thou ask not such a foolish thing.

YSED.

Yet tell me, lady: I am newly come
From out Cameliard.

COLUMBE.

Queen is she of Gore,

And wife to Uriens, but men say well

Excalibur

One kingdom likes her not, and she has won
By crafty magic and unchristian lore
Dominion over all the paynim gods
That fled from England when Christ Jesu came.
And now beneath the waters of the Mere
In golden caverns, wonderly beseen,
She holds her court.

SIR PELLEAS. Look, how she lifts her head
And gazes on us with her serpent eyes.

GUENEVER.
Methinks she brings a chill, ungentle wind
From out the hollows of the Magic Mere,
For I am cold, and shrink with creeping dread.

SIR LAUNCELOT.
Look not upon her, she may harm thee not
Whilst I stand ready.

COLUMBE. She is gone again,
But I do fear the malice of her eye.

SIR KAY.
One only man in Arthur's kingdom curbs
Her wanton witchcraft, for old Merlin holds
Her hard in leash, in that the craft of God,
Whereby he works, is potent to command
Queen Morgan's damnèd magic.

SIR TOR. If the king
Were not an headstrong boy that knows not fear,

Excalibur

**He would give ear to Merlin, and the witch
Should burn right merrily.**

SIR KAY. See where he comes
In guise full knightly on a royal quest,
The pride of chivalry, great England's king,
Arthur Pendragon, that did overthrow
King Lot of Orkney and King Carados
And all that leagued them 'gainst the high estate
Of Uther's kingdom.

GUENEVER. Is it, then, the king?
Full fain am I to look upon his face,
For since I came from far Cameliard
To Camelot, I only hear his name
Go rushing by me as a whispering wind,
Nor ever have I seen him.

COLUMBE. Guenever,
The king is hungry for a knightly quest;
For certain is it that the golden crown,
So lightly won, sits restless on his brow;
We may not hold him in the narrow court,
Where gray-beard councillors wag learnèd heads,
Or wanton girls with sleepy, longing eyes
Creep softly 'round him with sweet, subtle words.
Nor dalliance nor statecraft lure him now,
He rides afar afield.

GUENEVER. I fear me, then,
He is indeed the thing that all men say,
And so I hold him most unworshipful.

Excalibur

SIR KAY.

What thing is that ?

GUENEVER.

A man without a fault.
Such manners like me not. Give me a man
Content with that, nor greedy for the crown
The blessèd saints achieve when they are dead
And men no longer.

COLUMBE.

Fie upon thee, girl!
Thy words are peevish, and unmaidenlike
The thought that prompts them.

GUENEVER.

Thou art thrice mine age,
And that much nearer sainthood, lady mine,
Nathless ye liked my song. Ah, well-a-day!
We maids be nought but bratchets in a leash,
Give you good hunting! Hush, the king, the king!

(*Enter: KING ARTHUR, mounted, with him SIR ECTOR.
GUENEVER stands aside among the trees.*)

OMNES.

Hail to the King of England!

KING ARTHUR.

Give ye joy,
Sir knights and ladies fair. How now, Columbe,
Art weary of tall Camelot ?

COLUMBE.

My lord,
The springtime beckoned, and my heart was fain
To leave the courtelage of Camelot
And track the footsteps of the questing king.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

The while he followed where the springtime led,
Was that thy thought? Well, it was even so.
Maid April starts a quickening in the blood
That when the winds of June are on the fields
Is ill gainsaid. Come, Ector, let us rest
And crave refreshment of these gentle folk;
I would be weary were I not a king.

COLUMBE.

Will ye not drink, my lord? the sun is high,
And heavy hangs the harness of a knight.
Quaff thou this goblet: when thou art assuaged
Then shalt thou tell us of thy latest quest.

KING ARTHUR.

I thank thee, dame, yet have I nought to tell
Save of a Questing Beast I followed far
And won disworship of him in the end.

SIR KAY.

Of thy good grace, King Arthur, tell the tale.

KING ARTHUR.

'Twas in this wise, and ye may laugh at will.
When we had fought King Rience, and had freed
Leodegrance, King of Cameliard
(The which has one most wondrous daughter, hight
The Lady Guenever, more passing fair
Than saw I ever, even in my dreams.)
I rode in quest of some adventure. Noon

Excalbur

Was hot upon us, and I lay me down
Beside a fountain in a drowsy wood,
And if I slept I know not, but anon
Deep thunder rolled and I did see in sooth
The forest filled with griffins, gaunt and grim,
And slimy serpents, slaving as they crawled
On scaly bellies through the cringing grass.
High in the midst of all, as he were king,
I saw a beast beyond all mortal ken,
Huge, humped and horrible, with scaly sides
And twisted talons fierce with rending claws.
Winged was he with the pinions of a bat,
And either side his harsh and horny beak
Blazed baleful eyes that blinked and rolled amain,
While over all I saw as on his helm
The Dragon of our House.

The while I lay
And marvelled on this strange and grizzly thing,
Meseemed the wood grew thick with myriad knights
From all my kingdom. Then the raging Beast
Shrilled wonderly: right so the serpent brood
Hurled on my knights, and in such grievous wise
That in a little none was left on live.
And all the forest darkened as the Beast
Went howling onward. "Now Pendragon's seed
Shall slay Pendragon!" And I saw him not.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

By Holy Rood, a grim, ungentle dream.

KING ARTHUR.

So thought I, but I saw the Beast again.

Excalbur

COLUMBE.

With thine own waking eyes ?

KING ARTHUR.

I saw the Beast.

No word said I unto Sir Ector here
Of that I thought a dream, but on a day,
The while we rode athwart a savage wood,
Sir Ector cried: "Sweet Jesu, be my aid!
What thing is that ?" I looked, and lo, the Beast
Came hurling with the sound of many hounds
Adown a forest path until he spied
A little fountain, where he stayed to drink.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

And didst thou slay him ?

KING ARTHUR.

Listen, Launcelot.

Certes I pricked full hotly on the Beast,
But when he marked the onset, on he rolled
The while I followed fiercely. Weary leagues
I tracked him till my steed was clean forspent
And fell beneath me. Then the Questing Beast
Turned like a labouring carrack, and I dressed
My shield, for I did think a sore debate
Lay twixt us, but the Beast gave tongue and spake:
"Hail, king and father! Seekest thou for death ?
Not now, but after, comes the dolorous day."
Wherewith he vanished like a flash of light,
And so I won disworship of my quest.

COLUMBE.

By all the saints of God, an evil Beast!

Excalbur

Wilt quench thy thirst again? Come, Guenever,
Serve thou the king.

KING ARTHUR (*leaping up*). How say ye, Guenever?
Art thou the daughter to Leodegrance
King of Cameliard?

GUENEVER. No other maid,
I do protest, Sir king.

KING ARTHUR. Nay, by my sword,
I need no oath to prove me what thou art.
The day I freed thy father of Rience
Thou stood'st before me, matchless in my sight,
So like the splendid sun I fell abashed
And veiled mine eyes for worship of thy face.

GUENEVER.
And did my lord the king learn gentle speech
From this same Questing Beast? In Camelot
Men say he knows not how a maiden's face
Looks other than the visor'd visage grim
Of armoured knights.

KING ARTHUR. A murrain on the Beast!
In fair Cameliard I learned it well,
Nor slept a sennight for the wisdom gained.

GUENEVER.
Why, now I know they were but sorry japes
Wherewith the Court did mock me, for the king
Is not so faultless that he may not mark
A damsel's face, and tell her so withal.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

As thou shalt know, anon, my lady fair;
Come, sit beside me, let me see thine eyes
Look into mine, and let me hear thy voice
That lingers like the gentle summer wind
Among the yearning trees. Give me thy hand
And tell me of Cameliard — and thee.

(He leads her beneath the pavilion.)

YSED.

Look where Sir Launcelot, the dolorous knight,
Stands ringed with thunder.

ETTARD.

'Tis a grievous thing
To match a king in contest for a maid;
I do bemoan his fortune.

SIR PELLEAS.

Launcelot,—
Why, how now, Launcelot! Have speech with us,
Sir knight, be merry!

SIR TOR.

Art thou then unhorsed,
Forefoughten with the first rude shock of fight
That hurtles down the lists?

ETTARD.

Out on thee, Tor!
That thou shouldst mock a knight so all forlorn.

COLUMBE.

This likes me not: I would the king would ride
Upon some other quest.

(Exit SIR LAUNCELOT.)

Excalibur

YSED. Sir Launcelot!
He lightly leaves the field! Who follows on?
A merry chase; come, sirs, the hunt is up.

(Exit, followed by SIR TOR and SIR ECTOR.)

ETTARD.
I have no heart for such a scurvy jest;
Alas, poor Launcelot!

SIR PELLEAS. Bewail him not,
I back him 'gainst the king.

ETTARD. Nay, Pelleas,
Back no man 'gainst King Arthur.

SIR PELLEAS. Come away,
I do beseech thee, sweet, if thou dost say
"Back no man 'gainst King Arthur."

ETTARD. Save thyself,
For well thou knowest, Pelleas, my heart
Is like a stubborn fortress, strong and true,
Whereof thou hast the key.

SIR PELLEAS. Yet let us go
A little way along the water's rim,
For by his glances Arthur needs us not.

ETTARD.
Poor Launcelot!

Excalbur

SIR PELLEAS. Think not of him, Ettard,
Or follow, and I'll teach thee to forget.

(Exeunt.)

KING ARTHUR.
Sir Kay, I pray thee, wait not on us here,
I would not hinder thee.

SIR KAY. I do protest,
No hinderance, my lord.

KING ARTHUR. I do protest,
Most grievous hinderance, my fair Sir Kay:
We follow straitly.

COLUMBE. Sir, we must away.
Come thou with me, I fear the fruit of this.

(Exeunt SIR KAY and COLUMBE.)

KING ARTHUR.
My bonds are riven from me! They are gone,
And I may give my tongue full liberty
To voice the surging of my teaming heart.
I love thee, Guenever!

GUENEVER. And on the word
Thy sport o'ersteps the limits of a jest.
I am at fault that I did venture close
Upon the brink of danger. Come, my lord,
Let us go hence: this peril claims us not.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

I love thee! Give me back thy gentle hands,
And let me see the wonder of thine eyes
Upturned to mine. I lack all mode of speech
For pleading with thee, for my words are rude
And hardly tempered to the cause of love,
For that I am unlearnèd in the field
Where any courtier matches me unscathed,
That am for fighting, not for dalliance;
And so I know not any form of words
That is more potent than, I love thee, sweet!
I love thee!

GUENEVER. With such love as princes feign
To lightly lead them to the end thereof.
That usage likes me not.

KING ARTHUR. With such a love
As never yet was known of any man
Were he the truest knight of all the world!
I knew not why my father gave me life,
I knew not why I came by England's crown
Nor why I marched to free Leodegrance,
Thy father, till I saw thee, Guenever,
And then I knew!

GUENEVER. How lightly lies the oath
Of knighthood on thee. What of Launcelot,
Aye, what of Launcelot? High chivalry
Thou showest, king! Hast thou no thought for
him?

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

Nor him, nor yet for anything that lives,
Save only thee. The lightning of thine eyes
Blots out all memory, all honour, all
That guided, governed me. Sir Launcelot?
I know him not! Is he then overlord
Of thee and me, that I should wait on him
And crave his pleasure? Am I not a man,
A knight, a king? Shall I not match with him
In contest for thy favour? Art thou his?
How came he by thee? Is his title proved?
By God, I challenge it!

GUENEVER.

I know thee not
In this unwonted humour. Let me go,
Thou art distraught!

KING ARTHUR.

Aye, to the perilous edge
Of perfect madness! In my fevered veins
The seething blood cries out for recompense
And hot requital!

GUENEVER.

Of thy gentleness
Unloose me, king!

KING ARTHUR.

Not though the sword of God
Were brandished in mine eyes! I love thee, sweet,
Give me thy lips, thyself!

(Enter MERLIN.)

MERLIN.

King Arthur, hail!
And to thee, lady, my most high devoir.
My lord, I wait upon thee.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. Get ye gone!
Avoid my sight and lightly. Guenever! —

(Exit GUENEVER.)

MERLIN.
Stay thou with me, if thou indeed art king,
And other than thy folly doth denote.

KING ARTHUR.
What malice drove thee hither?

MERLIN. England, sir,
That hardly brooks divided loyalty.
Thou art the king. Let that enlightening torch
Shine ever on the road thou treadest in,
For by that light alone shalt thou avoid
Rude misadventure. I will chide thee not,
That thou hast played the fool. Thou art a boy,
And therefore prone to vain and wanton things;
But like a torrent raging lawlessly,
I'll turn thine ardour in an wholesome course
Until it serve God's ends.

KING ARTHUR. Must I abide
In vassalage to thine o'erriding spleen,
That am a king?

MERLIN. Abide a little yet
And shortly shalt thou reap the high reward.
No wanton humour leads me, but a cause,
A giant purpose, meet for England's king

Excalbur

To make his own. Endure me, good my lord,
And I shall set thee on the awful throne
Of universal majesty. But now
I missed thee from the council of the kings
That are thy vassals, and I find thee meshed
Within the springes of a wanton girl.
Yet will I chide thee not, but bid thee come
The while I show thee labour fit for kings,
And doubly fitting for thee, that shall reign
The lord of monarchs. Come, thy place is there
In Camelot, upon great England's throne.

Curtain.

SCENE II. *Camelot. The terrace of ARTHUR's castle.*
MORGAN LE FAY is standing alone, gazing on MERLIN's
tower, which rises solitary in the background.

MORGAN.

Thou black magician of the enchanted keep
Builded of dreams by subtle sorcery
To win dominion over all the world,
How shall I baffle thee?

Ringed 'round with cloud
Thy frowning tower, four-square, impregnable,
Fit symbol of thy pride, defies my will.
High on the giddy ramparts of the keep
Thy fell and fatal visage bends unseen
Above the mystic lore of perished worlds
For thou art sore bested. The puling boy
Thou fain wouldst make thy catspaw, fails thee sore,

Excalibur

Most mighty Merlin, and thou knowest not
What engine Morgan fashions for thy fall;
Wherefore, affrighted, thou dost grope for aid.
Strive thou amain, rive spell on evil spell
From out the murky caverns of thy lore,
Thou shalt not hinder me.

(Enter NIMUE.)

Ha, Nimue!
I need thee, girl: art ready to my hand?

NIMUE.

**As restless sword that clamours for the fray
Within the sluggard sheath of errant knight.**

MORGAN.

**I'll hale thee shortly from thy scabbard; look!
Where in his magic tower old Merlin sits,
A bloated spider, spreading wide the web
Wherein he thinks to catch us.**

NIMUE.

e. Like a fly
I'll buzz and blunder 'gainst his very fangs,
And when he springs, turn to a dragonfly
And stab him!

MORGAN.

AN. Thou shalt spread thy wings anon,
Thou subtle Nimue, for to my cost
I know that we may trap the silly king
Until our wit is withered, nor abate
As by the weight of one least little cloud
The curse that lets us, if we rest with that
And curb not Merlin.

Excalibur

NIMUE. Merlin fears us not,
For that the armour he has wrought him well
Of spells and magic gives him leave to laugh
At that we do.

MORGAN. I'll match him in his craft,
Else know I nought of sorcery, and bind
Him helpless in a sleep of living death.
There is a potent spell the fayter knows,
And only he, that grips in heavy sleep
Beyond all power to waken, whosoe'er
It falls on.

NIMUE. And thou'dst have me learn the rune
To-night ?

MORGAN. To-night, or after, if ye fail at first.
This thing we must achieve, there is no choice.
Win me the rune and England falls awrack.
The way I leave to thee, but guard thyself;
Thou tiltest not against an orgulous boy
But in the front of awful wisdom.

NIMUE. Good:
I sound my challenge! In the lists of life
Flame-favoured Love has ever overthrown
Sir Wisdom.

MORGAN. But not Merlin. He is armed
In supple harness that will turn the point
Of weapons deadly to the cringing king.
Be wise and wakeful; strike with subtler tools
Than serve against a man.

Excalibur

NIMUE. Is he not that?
Mayhap the cloak of wisdom clothes him well
But underneath is man. I strike at that.

MORGAN.
Meanwhile I lime the twigs to catch a king,—
But look ye where she comes! The savoury bait
Wherewith I lure him: Guenever.

NIMUE. Farewell,
The night is moonless: ere the east is gray
I'll cope with Merlin, and I win the rune!
(Exit.)

MORGAN.
How best to use this knotted skein of love
Where Launcelot, the king, and Guenever
Are sorely tangled? If the knight shall win
What follows but the fixing of the king
More strongly in his purpose to obey
The crafty Merlin. But if Arthur gain
And Launcelot yield nothing: —
Through the night
That was so dark I see a little star,
A little, distant star that waxes great
And brightens to a ball of shrieking flame
That shall with shame and slaughter overwhelm
The king, the Court, and Merlin: Guenever
I'll give the king,— and later, Launcelot.
A merry game and I can play it well; —
I call a greeting to thee, Guenever.

(Enter GUENEVER.)

Excalibur

GUENEVER.

Who hails me from the dusky twilight dim?
I cry thee pardon, lady, but the light
Befriends me not.

MORGAN.

It is the Queen of Gore.

GUENEVER.

Oh, ho! and Empress of the Magic Mere,
The lady of two kingdoms.

MORGAN.

Now, indeed,
I know thou givest ear unto the tales
Loose-hanging tongues set free in Camelot,
But this I tell thee, girl; the shameless knights
And wanton women wag forbidding heads,
Miscall me witch and mock me with their japes,
For that their witless folly likes me not
And I am wise in lore of many things
They know not of. Gray Merlin strikes them dumb,
With bated breath they pass him fearsomely,
But I, that am a woman, rouse their wrath
For matching Merlin.

GUENEVER.

And I blame them not;
Were I to couch a lance along the lists,
A she-knight thrusting in a fighter's field,
I'd give them leave to mock me. Well content
Am I that God has made me what I am,
Content that He has made men as they are;
My kingdom is mine own, I ask none else.

Excalibur

MORGAN.

The which is folly. Yet I like thee well,
And so let call a truce to warring words
The while I counsel thee. Thou art a girl;
An headstrong filly, heedless of the curb;
Lawless, impatient; learn a thing of me
That am well broken to the harness, wise
In diverse things that thou shalt know anon.

GUENEVER.

That I may reign beneath the Magic Mere
A queen of goblins? Keep thy learned lore,
An earthly crown contents me.

MORGAN.

Grasp it, girl,
And thou art Queen of England!

GUENEVER.

First, meseems,
I'd see it proffered. Thieving likes me not,
Nor yet a beggar's usage, when a crown
Is held for guerdon.

MORGAN.

Hear me, Guenever!
Witch am I, if it please the prating Court;
Wise am I, maugre Court and king and thee;
And this I know: thou art assotted, girl,
If thou dost think King Arthur loves thee not!

GUENEVER.

Fool am I, if it please the learnèd queen;
Maid am I, maugre Court and king and thee;
And so I knew King Arthur loved me well
When first he saw me in Cameliard.

Excalibur

MORGAN.

Then seize the crown he proffers with his heart.

GUENEVER.

The heart I see, but not as yet the crown.

MORGAN.

Nathless he holds it forth. I know the king,
And for a word thou shalt be crownèd queen.

GUENEVER.

Of England.

MORGAN.

Aye, of England: of the world!
Flout thou my wisdom if it pleaseth thee,
But well I know that on before the king
Stretches a path that rises to a height
Of glory and dominion such as men
As yet have never seen. Be thou the queen,
Walk thou with Arthur toward the blinding flame
Of fame and honour blazing in his path,
And thou shalt reign the Queen of Christiantie!

GUENEVER.

And pay the hateful price!

MORGAN.

Why dost thou gaze
With wistful eyes into the crowding dark?
The while with heavy sigh thou sayest slow
"And pay the hateful price." Can'st read the crest
Above the helmet of the drooping knight
That mounts the steep upon a jaded steed?

Excalibur

Nay, now I know! 'Tis Launcelot returned
To Camelot from riding on the quest
That quickly called him when the king returned
And found thee come from far Cameliard.
Dost sigh for him? Out on thee, Guenever!
That weighs a king against a wanton knight.

GUENEVER.

Be silent, witch, and lightly quit my sight!
Mock me no more, nor tempt me with the tale
Of crown and kingdom purchased with the blood
Of this my heart; I need thee not!

MORGAN.

Farewell!

I leave thee to Sir Launcelot, but mark
The thing I say: the crown is for thy brow,
Nor shall a knight let Arthur from his own.
(Exit.)

GUENEVER.

Ah me, unhappy, that am like a ball
Tossed back and forth across the tennis court;
Forbid to rest in any friendly hand,
But made the sport and pastime of a game.
Would well I knew so much of Morgan's lore
Or Merlin's, as would tell me why the heart
And brain were made of God fierce enemies,
Nor ever in accord.

The crown is mine
And at the price of one least little word,
For Arthur loves me, fain would make me queen,
To reign unchallenged; but Sir Launcelot

Excalbur

Would make me wife, and bend me to his will
A fawning slave.

What woman halts for choice
'Twixt service and dominion? So, the crown
Goes spinning down the vasty waste of night,
A mocking bauble, meet for envious fools.
The joust is over and the favour won,
Sir Heart, thou art the victor in the lists,
Sir Brain the recreant, I the warison!

(Enter: below the terrace, SIR LAUNCELOT. He remains for a time seated on his horse.)

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Although the night were darker than the depths,
Long since forgotten, of the nether hell
Where damnèd souls, forsaken, howl for light,
Yea, for the blazing of tormenting flame
So that 'twere light — I'd know thee, Guenever!

GUENEVER.

And were the world resounding with the din
Of rending heavens on the Judgment Day,
I'd hear thy voice if thou didst call my name,
O Launcelot!

SIR LAUNCELOT. Hide not within the night,
I know the king is with thee. Hale him forth
That I may see thy lover.

GUENEVER.

Launcelot!

Excalibur

SIR LAUNCELOT.

So thou didst call me when I won thy love,
Playing the maid to mock me for a churl;
But now that thou art wanton to a king,
Call me Sir fool!

GUENEVER.

I know not what thou art
Or knave or madman, for thy words are wild
As one assotted.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Wouldst thou have me deal
In honeyed words to match thy honeyed breath?
I call thee as thou art.

GUENEVER.

Thou liest!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Peace!
Nor think to mesh me in a web of words.
Thou art the lightest lady in the Court,
And I will prove it 'gainst whoever comes,
Be he the king.

GUENEVER.

Thou layest in the glare
Of some malignant moon, and thou art mad!
Avoid my sight, I look on thee no more,
Thou art distained forever.

SIR LAUNCELOT (*dismounting and coming on the terrace*).

Guenever,
'Tis thou that art distained. I thought thee mine,
Unsoilèd, faultless, and I find thee false
As rotting death's head grinning through the casque
That outwardly doth show the noble knight.
Unwrast my helm, my hauberk rent away,

Excalibur

My sword all shattered and my spear forhewn;
A craven knight, forlorn I walk the world,
Nor fall on worship whereso'er I go
For that I loved her that betrayèd me.

GUENEVER.

Am I a wanton that I stand at speech
And chaffer mouthings with a daffish churl?
This is the end. If I do look on thee
One only time in Camelot, beware!
I'll charge thee with black treason to thy face,
And call on every knight that loves the king
Or holds me worshipful, to prove me clean,
Upon thy craven body.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Stand thou there!

I have a thing to say. I loved thee well
And wore thy favour twined about my helm,
Wherefore I grew a jest for all the Court.
Thou wert King Arthur's, and they knew it well
The while I doted, heeding not the fame
That ran so lightly of thine evil ways.
Girls mocked me, curled their lips and laughed me
down;
Knights tossed the shameful jest from hand to hand;
The very pages round the royal throne
Shrilled scornful laughter when I passed them by,
And still I loved thee.

Then upon a day

Meseemed I could no longer 'dure the Court
And rode for silence in the tongueless wood.
Right so I met a maid that bade me stay,

Excalbur

And plucked me by the mantle, saying so,
With railing words: "Wouldst thou then find the
king?

I pray thee of thy gentleness, Sir knight,
Molest him not; he lies with Guenever
Among the ferns beside a little brook,
He needs us not."

A quarrel from the bow
I sped along the forest, drunk with wrath,
Believing naught, yet half believing all:
And then I saw thee. Through the leaning trees,
Beside the king I marked thee moving slow,
With willing eyes uplifted to his face.
White lightning seared mine eyeballs, heavy night
Shut down impenetrable, but I knew.

(*Enter KING ARTHUR.*)

GUENEVER.

For that thou art a faithless, miscreant knight,
And like a buzzard fain of filthy food,
All gorged with slander, I do owe thee nought,
But this I tell thee, I am blameless here.
By neither word nor act, nay, by no thought,
No little fawning fancy has the king
Done me disworship.

KING ARTHUR (*coming forward*).

It is soothly said,
And I will prove the lie with mine own sword,
Upon his body that with shameful tongue
Says that thou art not spotless before God.
What knave missays thee, Guenever?

Excalibur

GUENEVER.

Sir king,
I pray thee, harm him not: a blighting spell
Is over him, he knows not what he says,
For e'er by magic he was driven mad,
Thou knowest, king, he was a stainless knight.

KING ARTHUR.

Speak, traitor to thy king and chivalry,
That dost with bawdy mouth revile a maid!
The darkness cloaks thee, let me see thy face,
Stand forth, thou art no knight of Camelot!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

My lord,
I am no traitor!

KING ARTHUR.

Launcelot!
By Jesu's wounds, I would a thunderbolt
Had riven Camelot and hurled it wide
In rocky rain upon the blasted fields
Or ever I had seen this dolorous day!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

So say I, king, and hadst thou taken heed
Of thine own knighthood, and the scarlet shame
That like a broidered mantle thou hast cast
Upon the body of thy paramour,
Thou wouldst have halted in thy faithless quest.

KING ARTHUR.

I know not by what dark and devious road
Thou camest, Launcelot, unto this pass,

Excalibur

But that thou art a false, felonious knight
Distained of treason, foul with calumny,
Alas, I know. Deny thine evil words,
Upon thy knees beseech of Guenever
That she assoil thee of thy damnèd sin
Or thou dost fight thy king.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Right so, and now!

KING ARTHUR.

A spell is cast around Pendragon's House;
How other should a knight fight fierce and grim
Against his brother? For I loved thee, sir,
Aye, more than any man of all the Court,
Yet I do love mine honour over all,
Save only that of Guenever. Assay!
Unsheathe thy sword and dress thy heavy shield,
I have no harness; shieldless, void of helm,
Armed only with my sword I meet thy stroke,
For righteousness is hauberk to a king.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

And to a knight in equal measure. So,
I cast my helmet and my shield away,
Naked I stand before thee. Kill me, king,
Or thou shalt die for thy sins warison.

GUENEVER.

For God's love, hold! My honour cannot weigh
Within the balance 'gainst one little drop
Of royal blood, nor yet against thy life,
Sir Launcelot!—

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. Art ready?

SIR LAUNCELOT Cry you on!

(They fight.)

GUENEVER.

 If ye do love me, sirs, I pray ye, stay!

(Enter SIR KAY: with him pages bearing torches.)

SIR KAY.

 Who dares defy the laws of Camelot
 And with rude weapons war against the peace
 Of Arthur, King of England? Stay your swords,
 Or rightwise shall I charge ye with offence
 And treason 'gainst the king. Ha, Guenever!
 What knights are these?

GUENEVER.

 Woe to me, Seneschal,
 It is the king and Launcelot.

*(Enter: SIR PELLEAS, SIR TOR, ETTARD, and other
 Knights and Ladies, with them torch-bearers.)*

SIR KAY.

Alas!

 I know not how to speak for dole and woe;
 Lord Arthur, of thy grace I pray thee stay!
 Sir Launcelot, give way before the king,
 Nor peril England with thy faithless blade.

Excalibur

GUENEVER.

Lords, make an end of this! My heart is torn
That I, unhappy, am the sorry cause
Of this forlorn debate.

SIR TOR.

What evil star
Has risen over England?

SIR PELLEAS.

How befell
This wicked warfare twixt the hasty king
And Launcelot?

(*Enter: SIR ECTOR, MORGAN LE FAY, COLUMBE, YSED,
and others.*)

COLUMBE.

God's mercy, 'tis the king!
Sir Kay, bestir! Let not this awful shame
Fall blackening on the land.

SIR KAY.

Lord Arthur, see!
Upon my knees I cry thee mercy. Hold!
For God's love, hold. Think that thou art the king,
Nor hazzard England for a traitor's blood.

MORGAN (*aside*).

Too soon I see the fruit of my design
Fall all untimely, yet I grasp it now.

YSED.

See, see! King Arthur bleeds, and Launcelot
Is pressing on him sorely!

Excalibur

SIR TOR. Hal! the king
Is smiting wonderly. The knight is lost,
He falls!

SIR PELLEAS. No, no! He struck that blow aside;
Look there!

SIR KAY. My lord!

SIR ECTOR. By God, this endeth here!
(*He draws and rushes on LAUNCELOT.*)

KING ARTHUR.
Who lets me from the fight or strikes my foe,
Hangs dead to-morrow on the castle wall!

(MERLIN has entered: he strides through the crowd, seizes ECTOR's sword, and with it strikes down the weapons with such force they fall on the ground.)

MERLIN.
Then so I die, for so I end the fight.
Lord Arthur, thou art king and thou art law;
Thou art incarnate England, and thy word
Is backed with all the majesty of God.
Nathless through me speaks all the awful line
Of perished kings that gave thee life and crown,
And with a voice that brooks of no reply.
Save thou thy sword for England's enemies!

MORGAN (*aside*).
Again I meet thee; Merlin, thou shalt die!

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

Am I the king, or thou, bold sorcerer?
One word from me and I may see thee torn
In horrid gobbets here before mine eyes!

MERLIN.

That word knells England's doom. No earthly
king
Although he hold dominion streight from God,
Sits on a steadfast throne unless he learn
The wisdom that God gives not with a crown.

KING ARTHUR.

And this I learn from thee, my master?

MERLIN.

Aye,
From me, King Arthur. I was grim with years
When first thou gavest tongue, and when the king
That did beget thee mouthed his mother's breast,
Still aged was I. Be persuaded, king,
By Merlin that did give Excalibur
Into thy hand.

KING ARTHUR.

So all my royalty
Is but a pageant. I must let thee reign,
Most potent master!

MERLIN.

Ring thyself with knights
And daunt the world with show of dreadful arms,
Thou art a crownèd jester, if thou lack'st
The prop of wisdom for thy majesty.

Excalbur

KING ARTHUR.

Thou speakest well, and I am sore distained
That with unwatchful heart I did forget
The solemn warning thou didst bid me heed,
Yet, by my knighthood, I could find no choice,
For Launcelot did blacken Guenever
With most ungentle slander, and the crown
That guards the head clings not about the heart.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Thou hast not proved the slander on me, king,
Nor blotted out the shame with thine own blood;
Wherefore I stand my ground Before the Court,
Yea, Arthur, before God, with brimming tears,
For that my heart is broken that my king
Should deal dishonourably with a maid
I loved with passing worship, once again
I do impeach thee of unknighly shame.

SIR TOR.

I challenge thee!

SIR ECTOR.

God's blood, I'll prove the lie
Upon thy body!

OMNES.

Treason, treason!

KING ARTHUR.

Hold!

Gramercy for your loyalty, my knights,
But neither words nor blood blot out a lie,
The deed is all. Hear, lords and knights at arms,
Sir Launcelot impeacheth me of shame;

Excalibur

Take ye the answer. Lady, of thy grace
I do beseech thee hear me. Thou art she
That I do love in loyal, knightly wise,
As I have loved thee since the blessed day
When first I saw thee in Cameliard.
God knows, and thou, there is no bond of shame
Betwixt us, maugre the scandal of the Court,
And therefore, Guenever, wilt thou be queen
Of Arthur and of England?

MERLIN. Stay!

GUENEVER. My lord
As I am stainless and all clean of sin —
I will be Queen of England.

MORGAN (*aside*). I have won!

KING ARTHUR.
Bid all the trumpets blow, and let the flame
Of flaunting beacons paint the sombre sky.
England, thou hast a queen!

OMNES. Hail, Guenever!

SIR LAUNCELOT (*aside*).
Christ Jesu, of thy mercy, let me die!

MERLIN.
So comes the terror stalking through the night.

MORGAN.
Merlin, the fight is lost, and England falls.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Not in thy hands, black witch!

KING ARTHUR.

Come, Launcelot:

Thou hast impeached thy king and drawn a sword
Against his sacred body. Stand thou forth;
What chastisement befits thee?

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Let me die.

GUENEVER.

In God's name, dear my lord —

KING ARTHUR.

Peace, Guenever.

It needs not that thy heart should intercede
For Launcelot. I am no orgulous fool
To slay the knight that guards my lady's fame.
Give me thy hand, the hand that heaved a sword
Against thy king to shield a maid. I swear
Thou didst win greater worship of me, sir,
Than found I ever in all Camelot.
I know thee now, a fearless champion
Of maiden's honour, and a noble knight.
Look thou, Sir Launcelot, that when the crown
Of England tops the head of Guenever,
Thou dost defend her honour to thy death,
Yea, 'gainst the king himself.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

I pray thee now

Let me depart, my heart is like to break.

KING ARTHUR.

Yet would I have thee by me, Launcelot,
I need thy knightly heart. Come, Guenever.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

One only word, King Arthur. When the sands
Have told an hour of the passing night,
I wait for thee upon the battlements
Of Merlin's Tower.

ARTHUR.

Lightly will I come.
And now, lead on, Sir Kay. Unsheathe your
swords,
Hurl them in air, my knights, and let the horns
Declare the tidings unto all the world,
The while with lusty voices ye acclaim
Queen Guenever!

OMNES.

Gód save Queen Guenever!

(*Exeunt.*)

MORGAN (*alone*).

So passes Arthur to his destiny
And I abide. Queen Morgan, thou art free!

Curtain.

SCENE III. *Camelot. The ramparts of MERLIN's tower. MERLIN is seated in the midst of the platform. Midnight.*

MERLIN.

How silent lie the purple fields of God
Above the troubled earth. Since time began,

Excalibur

When, by the fiat of Omnipotence,
The howling chaos, without form, and void,
Swelled to this awful vault, the hollow dome
That prisons us upon this little world
Has hung inexorable. Like a bird
That beats with futile wing against the roof,
The soul soars through the cavernous abyss
To smite impatient pinions 'gainst the sky
And falls back, vanquished. On the farther side
Of that impenetrable firmament
Lies Wisdom absolute, wherein the saints
And shining angels have a part with God.
Yet we that need so grievously the light
Of knowledge, were it but a slender ray
No larger than should filter through the chink
Of any little star, must live our lives
Unholpen, undirected.

What is this
That I have won of wisdom but the blind
And devious gropings of a creeping worm
Hid in the heavy earth? The world of men
He knows not, as I know not what is hid
Forever by that roof of adamant.
And yet, such learning as I win must serve
To make me master of these little men
Whereof I build a kingdom. Oh, how frail
The stones that I must work withal, how small
The craft that aids me, and when all is done
How unenduring is the fabric raised.

I may not think of this, but for the time
As other men, see that which lies to hand,

Excalibur

For wisdom works inaction in the blood
By showing forth the dread futility
Of that we do. How darkness chills the will
And halts the hand. Come, disenchanting flame,
Dispel my languor!

(He kindles the brazier. Enter: NIMUE.)

NIMUE. Prythee, chide me not
That I have clomb with unfamiliar feet
Unto thy rocky fastness. Let me rest
Above the world with thee, a little space,
I will not hamper thee.

MERLIN. Were I a boy
All flushed with ardours, I would think a dream
Encountered with me in some dusky pass
Of unsubstantial sleep.

NIMUE. Why stare ye, sir,
And bend your solemn brows upon my face?
Is it so strange a thing to meet a maid
Within thy frowning stronghold?

MERLIN. Wit ye well
You are the only lady of the court
That would forgather with the sorcerer
Upon his tower. Streightway give me word
Of that thou needest, for the night is old
And thou must lightly go.

Excalfour

NIMUE. Dismiss me not!
The boon I crave leaves thee no poorer, lord,
Yet may it make me rich.

MERLIN. Ye lack the spell
To win unwilling love?

NIMUE. 'Tis soothly said;
My love returns to me with empty hands.

MERLIN.
I may not aid thee. Potions like me not,
Nor silly spells. Go thou to Morgan, girl,
That she may ease thee.

NIMUE. Out upon the witch
That deals with pagan demons in the Merel
I will not speak with her.

MERLIN. Then thou art wise,
Yet shalt thou lack thy philtre.

NIMUE. Better so
Than that I peril mine immortal soul
In most unchristian commerce with a witch.
I am content to couch me at thy feet
The while with potent hand thou dost control
The straying stars, compel the elements
That with unkindly malice hinder us
And let us from our goal. Deny me not,
But suffer me to crouch against thy feet,
Most mighty master.

Excalibur

MERLIN. Nay, thou silly child,
Thy vigil gains scant comfort. What have I
To give thee, that am but a surly seer,
While thou art ——

NIMUE. But a woman! Say ye so?
Nay, Merlin, I am more, for perfect love
Ennobles e'en a woman.

MERLIN. What a thing
Is woman, then, without the gift of love,
That with it is but hell's ambassador.

NIMUE.
I cannot hear thee, Merlin, let thine eyes,
Aweary of their scanning of the stars,
Look less unkindly on me. Read my heart
And learn what I would tell thee.

MERLIN. Mock me not!
I am no lusty knight. Love's apples grow
In other fields, not on the barren crest
Of Merlin's Tower. Lightly get ye hence,
I am aweary.

NIMUE. Nay, I leave thee not.
Art thou forspent? I'll pillow thee in sleep
Upon my bosom. Art thou sad withal?
Then shall I make thee laugh for joy of life,
And cradle thee in dreams that shall dispel
The lurking visions of adversity.

Excalibur

My lord, my love, look deep into mine eyes
And see my secret!

(Soft music.)

MERLIN. Dreams assail me, dreams
Of days that are not: dreams of laughing love,
And dreams of love that wept for very joy.
Why should I dream?

NIMUE. I love thee, Merlin!

MERLIN. Stay!
I heard a voice that spake an unknown tongue,
The which did say "I love thee."

NIMUE. Lift thine eyes
And look upon my face!

*(The night slowly flushes with rosy light, and all the
sky turns to a flowery pleasaunce.)*

MERLIN. Who art thou?

NIMUE. She
That loved thee long ago.

MERLIN. I know thee not
And yet,— I love thee!—

NIMUE. Crush me to thy breast,
Thou lord of all the world. Give me thy lips

Excalibur

And drink the wine of life that brimming high
Shall quench thine anguish!

MERLIN. Dreams assail me, dreams
Of days that may be nevermore.

NIMUE. My lord,
See how the forest opens for our feet
This day of June. It is the Land of Love,
Come follow, follow ——

(She mounts the battlements. MERLIN follows slowly.)

MERLIN. Dreams assail me, dreams
That baffle me ——

NIMUE. Give me thy groping hand!
We two will lie beneath the little leaves
The while they whisper sleepy songs of love,
And noon melts into night.

MERLIN. A mocking spell
Is over me: my heart has ceased to beat:
My brain is in disorder. Help me, God!
My craft is broken!
(He makes the sign of the cross: the vision vanishes.)
Damn thee, witch of hell!
I know thee now!

NIMUE. Have mercy, master!

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Go!

(He hurls her down from the battlements, then slowly descends and seats himself by the table.)

How better am I than the least of these
Ignoble creatures that I make my pawns
Upon the board where I do play at chess
With destiny. Am I no more than they
That I should be beguiled of sorcery?
Merlin, thou art a wittol! Mend thy wits
Or England crumbles.

(Enter: KING ARTHUR.)

Thou art welcome, king;
So like a cloud I find thee, changing form
With every little wind, unstable, frail,
I durst not count upon thee. Being come
I crave thy patience. I'll have speech with thee.

KING ARTHUR.

Meseems thou art ungentle in thy words
And scant of courtesy. I am thy king
While thou art — Merlin.

MERLIN.

Merlin am I still
When thou art crownless and a naked soul
Abashed before the Lord, an' thou dost flout
The aid I offer thee.

KING ARTHUR.

Say on.

MERLIN.

Sir king,
I am thy servant if thou dost obey,

Excalbur

Thy master else. Before thee, face to face
I tell thee this. Exalt thy feeble will,
Cry scorn upon the burrowing sorcerer
And magnify thy royal majesty,
Thou shalt not balk me. I will make thee king
Despite thee.

KING ARTHUR. Do I let thee from thy goal?
If thou hast any ground for chiding me,
If any way I fail of my devoir,
Name me the deed, nor stretch authority
Until it snap, with arrogant reproach.

MERLIN.
So be it. Arthur, look upon this scroll
Wherein is traced the circle of the skies
At thy nativity. In each its place
Are posited the planets and the stars,
The sun, the moon, the constellations, all
The fortunes and infortunes as they held
When thou didst see the light. Now mark them
well.
For never stood the stars in this array
For any man before. So marvellous
And all unwonted is their strange design,
A word, a breath, a thought may tip the scale,
Make thee immortal, make thee infamous.
And dost thou marvel that I watch thee well
When thou art walking on the dizzy rim
Of fortune, that is like a naked sword
Set edgewise over hell?

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. Act thou thy part
As guardian of the State, if so thou art;
Oppose me not in mine. I am the king,
And royalty strikes deeper than the crown.
Give me thy council, aid me with thy lore,
But hold in mind I am no puppet king
Content with empty majesty. I reign!
And while the crown is mine I shame it not
By playing pupil to thy mastership.

MERLIN.
I hear Pendragon speaking through thy mouth
And am content, but only with thy words.
Act as thou speakest, king, and I am dumb,
But while thy words are grave thy deeds are wild
And wanton. Ruin crouches close at hand
Where thou dost walk, and for a paltry whim
Thou'dst barter England.

KING ARTHUR. Name thy grievance, sir!

MERLIN.
Did I not hold thee from thy doltishness
Thou'dst lightly make a queen of Guenever.

KING ARTHUR.
By God, I make her queen despite thy will!
This leaps the bounds of reason. Must I crawl
On supplicating belly to thy feet
And crave thy grace to wed with her I love?
I will not!

Excalibur

MERLIN. Listen: in the seventh house,
Yea, in the cusp thereof, in square of Mars,
The Great Malefic, grim, implacable,
Frowned on thy birth, and therefore shalt thou
 swear
To have no part in love forevermore;
For if thou takest to thy throne a queen,
Were she as pure as flame, thou shalt descend
Into thy grave a cuckold, and I read,
Alas, too clearly, in thine evil stars,
That England is entangled in thy fall.

KING ARTHUR.
I know not why I do abide thy speech,
Thou foul-mouthed slanderer, nor hurl thee down
Incontinently from the battlements
For speaking thus of Lady Guenever.
I give my life in hostage for her faith,
Content thyself with that.

MERLIN. Thou art o'er bold.
Dost thou not know that with a whispered word
I could weave round her such a subtle spell
That thou shouldst see her not forevermore?
No man wins aught of me by haughty words,
For as the sword leaps baffled from my breast
So threats fall from me.

KING ARTHUR. Thou dost daunt me not.
Lay by thy magic for the quaking girls
That throng the Court. I marry Guenever!

Excalbur

MERLIN.
Not while I live.

KING ARTHUR. Then shalt thou shortly die,
For, by God's wounds, I will!

MERLIN. Wait for the proof;
I have a hand in this. I made thee king,
And king I'll keep thee 'til the doleful day
When England totters, and Pendragon's seed
Shall slay Pendragon for Pendragon's lust.

KING ARTHUR.
Mock me not, Merlin, with an idle rune,
For magic is no medicine for love.
Within the ordered limits of thy sphere
Be thou my guide, but look ye leave them not,
For there is yet another province, meet
For other councillors, and there I bar thee, sir.
Molest me not, for love brooks no control
Of wisdom or of magic or of fear.

MERLIN.
Swear on thy knighthood and the holy Cross
That thou wilt cast away all love and lust.

KING ARTHUR.
Lust will I cast away, but never love;
Who mocks thereat is damned for blasphemy.

MERLIN.
Who plays with either perils all things else.

Excalibur

I tell thee, boy, this kingdom is not won
Save by him only that shall thrust away
All thought of love. The brand Excalibur
Carves not a kingdom if the wielding hand
Is tethered to a maiden's silly heart,
And therefore I forbid thee.

G ARTHUR. Save thy words,
For here I act alone. Withhold thine aid
Since so it pleases thee. I call on God,
And He who gave me leave to live and love
Shall guard me.

RLIN. Go thy ways, thou silly fool!
I builded on a false and shifting sand
When I did build on thee. The hour is gone,
And once again shall England split with strife
Until the wrath of God comes hurling forth
To strike thee by the hand of thine own son,
For so the doom shall fall.

G ARTHUR. I know the rune
And heed it not, my life I leave with God,
And He shall take it when and how He will.
But if He call me not before the spring
Comes burgeoning o'er England, once again
Pendragon's seed shall sprout in virgin fields,
To reign when God shall cast me from the throne.
So, thou art answered.

RLIN. In such dolorous wise
That I am fain of death. I pray thee, go!

Excalbur

Nor seek me ever when thou art bested.
So splits the golden dream!

KING ARTHUR. I will not go
With wrath and malice. Merlin, I must live,
My life, not thine, and even as my soul
That I revere as God's ambassador
Commands me. Thou art withered with thy years
And may not know the majesty of love,
Therefore, my heart must be a sealèd book,
Clasped, clamped, and locked before thy failing
sight,
Yet I may read it well, and in the words
I see the tracing of the hand of God.
By this I walk. I can no other thing.

(Exit.)

MERLIN.
How like my life is this forlorn abyss
Of empty air that rings me with a wall
Of unrelenting iron. All alone,
Unaided, unbefriended, I abide
In solemn isolation, toiling on
To build a nation of the headstrong boys
That feign man's grave estate. Why should I
strive
To wrench incompetence to dignity
Against its will?
Fool! for that thou art wise
With lofty learning men know nothing of:
Thou art of them that rule the childish world.

Excalibur

Thou art the king.

Ye silent, baffling stars,
Give me your aid! How shall I win the cast,
Despite the headlong folly of the boy
I crowned with England's crown? From sore
defeat

Shall I not win abundant victory?
That thing I do, but by what subtle means?

King Arthur weds with Guenever. I heard
Pendragon speaking, and I know the blood.
What follows after? King Leodegrance
Henceforth is England's vassal. Small reward
I find the fact, but -- King Leodegrance!

Merlin, thou art assotted! Rouse thy wits
That are not used to such base treachery.
Queen Guenever? Aye, let her wear the crown,
And let the king be lapped in dalliance
If so he please. Out of Cameliard
The daughter of Leodegrance shall bring
A dowry that will disenthral the State,
Release it from dependence on the king,
And guard it with invincible defence.

So cometh victory from overthrow,
So wisdom matches folly. So I win
Dominion absolute. Leodegrance
Yields the Round Table into Arthur's hand!

Curtain.

Excalibur

ACT III

SCENE I. *Camelot. The great hall of the castle. SIR TOR, SIR ECTOR, SIR PELLEAS, SIR BREUSE, and other Knights.*

SIR PELLEAS.

Now drain a beaker to Lord Arthur's love
And England's queen that shall be, on a day;
The fairest mistress and most worshipful
Betwixt the borders of the Scottish king
And grim Tintagail by the southern sea.
The Lady Guenever!

OMNES.

Hail, Guenever!

SIR BREUSE.

Forget not Launcelot! Come, good my lords,
And drink oblivion to Launcelot
Lest he rebel. 'Twere safer for the State.

SIR TOR.

Missay him not. As any loyal knight
He yields before the king, nor stretches forth
A hungry hand to grasp the thing he gave.

SIR BREUSE.

A noble knight! yet may the gift return
For very liking; he will scorn it not.

Excalibur

SIR PELLEAS.

Out on thy lewd and bawdy tongue, Sir Breuse,
That dares missay a maid with scurrile japes;
Thou art forsworn, thou false, felonious knight!

SIR BREUSE.

Meseems I hear the voice of Launcelot,
But by the Mass, I look not on his visage;
Yet is he champion of Guenever
By right of earliest holding, and I crave
His pardon that I mocked his paramour.

SIR PELLEAS.

That word against thy teeth, thou lying knave!

SIR BREUSE.

How now, 'tis not Sir Launcelot that speaks,
But Pelleas? Why, thou most orgulous boy,
Art thou then of the blest? This makes amaze
Fall heavy on me.

SIR PELLEAS.

Draw thy cankered sword,
Thou shame of knighthood, for I prove the lie
Upon thy body!

SIR BREUSE.

Must I fight with babes?
Strange portents loom in England, when a maid
Forgets to favour men, and for a whim
Is fain of boys and makes them champions.

SIR PELLEAS.

Wil't fight or no?

Excalbur

SIR TOR. Stand back, good Pelleas!
Breuse saunce Pit , this overleaps a jest.
Guard thou thy tongue: we brook no calumny
Against a maid.

SIR ECTOR. Curb thou thy bastard blood
Or thou shalt lose it lightly; we are knights,
Not savage churls, and slander likes us not.

SIR BREUSE. Is any here would have to do with me?
My sword is ready!

SIR TOR. Worship is not won
For fighting misbegotten savages.
Hold hard thy tongue, or lightly as ye may
Get thee again into thy wilderness.

SIR BREUSE. Fair manners find I in the haughty Court!

SIR ECTOR. Thou'lt straitly cope with deeds as well as words,
An' thou dost silence not thy railing speech.
Avoid him, Pelleas, and you, Sir Tor.
Come hither where the air is sweeter; sirs,
What know ye of the rumour in the Court
Touching the deed that Arthur does to-day?
Fame is that some unwonted fortune falls
On England through that King Leodegrance,
We freed of Welsh Rience, but of what temper
The merit is, or how the boon shall come,

Excalibur

Whether of gold or knights or land, none knows
That I have coped with. Wit ye ought of this ?

SIR TOR.

Naught save that never ransom matched with his.

SIR PELLEAS.

And I o'erheard the seneschal the while
He muttered awsome: "And I shall see
Our glory grow again; Leodegrance,
By thee comes England's dawn!"

SIR ECTOR.

'Tis very strange;
A fleeting memory, like fading smoke,
Slips lightly by me of a magic tale
My father told me very long ago
When Arthur was my brother, of a thing
The dead King Uther had whereby the State
Waxed wonderly, until a doleful day
Whereon a king did wrest it from his hold,
The which was England's ruin.

SIR PELLEAS.

That, mayhap,
Was Joseph's sword, Excalibur.

SIR ECTOR.

Not so,
For I remember me the legend well
Of that most holy brand Lord Arthur won
In London at King Uther's burial.

(Enter: SIR KAY.)

Excalbur

SIR PELLEAS.

Would well we knew.

SIR TOR.

Look where the seneschal
Comes well besene in honour of the day.
Ask him, Sir Ector.

SIR ECTOR.

Father, by thy leave
I pray thee tell us of this wondrous thing
King Arthur gainèd of Cameliard,
The which works fame for England.

SIR KAY.

Curb thy zeal,
Nor strive to sound the secrets of the king.
I promise thee he tells ye when the time
Has reached its term, but I can say ye nought,
Nor will for all your asking.

SIR PELLEAS.

Fair Sir Kay,
Play not a churlish part, it ill beseems
Thy gentle bearing and so gracious heart.
Tell us, good seneschal.

SIR KAY.

Prevent me not,
Nor vex me with your prying inquiries,
I must attend the king. I tell ye nought.

SIR PELLEAS.

And brave and hardy is the reason, sir;
Thou knowest nothing.

SIR TOR.

I'll be sworn of that.

Excalibur

SIR KAY.

How now, ye insolent and saucy knaves,
"Know nothing?" By the Mass, I know enough
To make your swelling hearts burst through the ribs
For exultation. I know nought forsooth!

SIR PELLEAS.

Then go your ways, Sir Kay, unto the king,
And we will tell thee ere a little space
What ransom King Leodegrance did give,
For certes thou art ignorant.

SIR KAY.

I know,
Ye shameless knights!

SIR PELLEAS.

Nay, nay, Sir seneschal,
The king has told thee nothing.

SIR KAY.

Aye, he has,
And rounded my old eyes with wonderment.—
But I must to him — Stay! Ye think I boast
Of that I know not — but I must away,
The king has summoned me.

SIR TOR.

Our high devoir
Unto his lordship, and our humble praise
That he did tell thee nought, wise seneschal.

SIR KAY.

This passes bearing! King Leodegrance
Cedes the Round Table for his ransom. Hush,
No word of this to any eager ear
In Camelot. Farewell!

(Exit.)

Excalibur

SIR PELLEAS. In sooth, Sir Kay
Guards well the treasured secret of the king,
Yet I do think he gave us little light.
What boots a table to us ?

SIR ECTOR. 'Tis the same!
I do remember now; the Table Round
That was the pledge of prowess in the field,
The guaranty of valour unexcelled;
But how and why I do remember not.

SIR PELLEAS.
Meseems I win small wisdom from thy words,
For to the full they are as tenebrous
And blind of meaning as thy father's speech.
Sir Tor, I count on thee, for thou art merged
In gloomy seas of studious debate.
Read us the riddle!

SIR TOR. As a mariner
Contending with the rough and burly waves,
Gropes blindly for the rope outflung for aid
Nor grasps it ever, so I clutch in vain
At fleeting phantoms of forgotten things.
The great Round Table of Pendragon,—aye,
My father told me of its awful worth,
So much I know.

(Enter: above, MERLIN.)

SIR PELLEAS. And that is nothing!—Hail,
Thou fearsome Merlin, I did think thee near,

Exaltbur

For on a moment all the hall grew dim
With murky darkness, as a cloud had drawn
Athwart the merry visage of the sun.
We stand at gaze, magician, dumb with doubt,
But thou art come to bring us blessed ease;
What is the ransom of Leodegrance,
The great Round Table?

MERLIN. What is that to thee?
Where heard ye ought of this?

SIR PELLEAS. Where else, fair sir,
Save at the bubbling mouth of gossip's well,
The prudent seneschal, that strongly swore
He would tell nothing, and then lightly told.

MERLIN.
 Confide thy secrets to judicious age
 That like a withered bawd goes up and down
 To hawk her wares along the market-place!

SIR PELLEAS.
A truce to mouldy saws; tell us of this!

MERLIN.
 Since ye do have the half, take ye the whole.
 The great Round Table of Pendragon comes,
 And so is England armed against the world.

SIR ECTOR.
That much we know.

SIR TOR. But not the cause thereof.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

When blessèd Joseph came from Palestine
Unto the sacred isle of Avalon,
He brought the awful Sword, Excalibur,
And that most precious Thing, the Holy Grail.
Long time he lay in Avalon, and they
That came with him from looking on the face
Of Jesu Christ, did build a little church
Where stands the solemn pile of Glastonbury,
And daily did the brothers sit at meat
Around the Table.

One by one the Lord
Callèd them to Him, till the latest left,
Alone and watching, heard the welcome voice.
Yet ere he answered he did give the Sword,
The Holy Grail, and this same Table Round,
Unto the king from out whose mighty loins
Sprang great Pendragon's line. A little while
Pendragon guarded well the sacred gift
And England waxed in glory. On a day
He proved unfaithful, and the Holy Grail
Returned to heaven, yet the Sword remained,
And eke the Table. Slowly rolled the years
Until King Uther's father's father reigned,
By whom the Sword was lost. Then evil hap
Swept darkening over England; pestilence,
Famine and battle blasted all the land,
Until the king stood in such sorry plight
He gave the Table to Cameliard
For aid and succour 'gainst the paynim kings.
So fell great England's glory, and the shame
That scorched her fields burned out the memory

Excalibur

Of ancient honour.

Glory be to God,
That did withhold His wrath, the Sword is come,
And now the Table once again returns.
The night is broken, and Pendragon's seed
Shall reign, Pendragon, on Pendragon's throne.
For 'round the Table knights invincible,
Seven score and ten, each thronèd in his siege,
Shall round a ring that none shall cope withal.

SIR PELLEAS.

And are we chosen ?

SIR ECTOR.

Are we summoned here
To see the founding of the Table Round ?

SIR TOR.

Who names the knights to form this wondrous ring,
Who marks the sieges, Merlin ?

MERLIN.

God Himself!
Whoso shall sit beside the sacred board
Gains double prowess by His sovereign grace.
But none may claim a siege save only he
Whose sword is stainless: who has won renown
In joust and tourney: who can bring the proof
Of some adventure, knightly, worshipful:
And in whose heart the flame of honour burns
Untroubled of the breath of any shame.
So once again the fame of England soars
On beating wings into the farthest height
Of earthly majesty. So God He sends

Excalbur

Unto King Arthur endless victory,
Rimless dominion, and a steadfast crown.
No longer England chafes within the curb
Of fretting seas, but leaps the narrow flood
And wins the world, Pendragon's heritage!
(*Exit.*)

SIR ECTOR.
Ye mock us, Merlin!

SIR PELLEAS. He is gone again.
And as he came, unmarked of any eye.
How think ye, Tor, did Merlin jest with us,
Or is this wonder rising to its dawn?

SIR TOR.
I doubt me nothing, now King Arthur reigns;
No marvel balks me.

SIR ECTOR. Hark, what horns are these,
Didst hear them?

SIR TOR. Aye, look where Duke Lucas comes
Forspent with haste. What word?

SIR PELLEAS. Lord duke, what word?

(*Enter: DUKE LUCAS.*)

DUKE LUCAS.
Good sirs, I come from looking on a thing
So passing wonderful I lack the heart

Excalibur

To give it forth, for ye will cry me down,
And mock me for a madman.

SIR TOR. Nay, no whit.
We take thy word, for wonders with the sun
Rise brightning over England on this day.

SIR PELLEAS.
Hast thou descried a comet in the noon
Fighting the sun with greater glory?

SIR ECTOR. Speak,
Duke Lucas of the Southfolk, nor defraud
Our hungry ears of marvels.

DUKE LUCAS. As I rode,
But now to answer to the king, I spied
A little army wonderly arrayed,
And decked with trappings alien to mine eyes.
No banners blew along the morning air,
All blank the shields that swung beside the knights,
But fashionèd of brass that mocked the sun
With emulating fire. For a space
I halted, dumb with wonder; moving slow
The pageant passed, and in the midst thereof
I saw twelve aged men, most reverend
And grave of countenance; within each hand
A branch of olive spake the peaceful quest,
The which assuaged my doubt, and so with spur
Unspared I galloped here to Camelot
To warn the castle.

Excalibur

SIR ECTOR. Embassy from Rome!
So far the fame of England's name has fled.

SIR TOR.
Call out the knights! Advise the heedless king
Of this most gracious advent.

(Trumpets without.)

DUKE LUCAS. Follow me!
Hark, how the trumpets signal Rome's approach,
Make we what show we may. Come on, Sir
knights!

(Trumpets.)

SIR PELLEAS.
I know that song: the horns of Camelot
Give England's greeting to Imperial Rome.
Cry royal welcome, knights!

OMNES. Hail, Rome! All hail!
(Exeunt: leaving SIR BREUSE.)

SIR BREUSE.
So, like a mob of silly, gaping boys,
The fawning hounds troop off to mouth and stare.
I rest me here and watch; I have her word,
Queen Morgan's word, that I shall wear the crown
That Arthur ravished from the rotting skull
Of Uther. Shall I gain it then to-day?
Ha, Morgan!

Excalibur

(*Enter: MORGAN LE FAY.*)

MORGAN. Hail, Sir Breuse saunce Pité,
How like ye Camelot?

SIR BREUSE. As bastards love
The house forbid them by their father's lust.
How else?

MORGAN. Thou art discourteous of speech.
Dost owe me nothing?

SIR BREUSE. No!

MORGAN. How now, thou knave?
I promise thee the crown.

SIR BREUSE. And give it not.

MORGAN. Thou puling child, a crown is hardly won
For asking.

SIR BREUSE. But by taking. Mark the king.

MORGAN. The king? The crown is toppling to its fall
From off his vaunting head. Hold thou thy hand
And wait on me; when thou dost see it roll
A trundling circlet to thy shambling feet,
Then grasp it! Thou art king and I am queen.

Excalibur

SIR BREUSE.
And Uriens?

MORGAN. Falls with Lord Arthur's crown.

SIR BREUSE.
How long must I abide?

MORGAN. Until the king
Has married Guenever, and Launcelot
Makes noble horns sprout on the royal head
To crowd the crown!

SIR BREUSE. And on the word he comes.
Bid him bestir.

(Enter: SIR LAUNCELOT.)

MORGAN. Hail, Launcelot du Lake,
Thou art o'er kind to wait upon the king
That lightly triumphs over thee.

SIR BREUSE. Be sure
He'll not attend thee, knight, in gentle wise
The night thy triumph falls!

SIR LAUNCELOT. Hark ye, Sir Breuse,
I am not tempered to abide thy words
This day or any when, as slimy snails
Defile a rose, they do befoul the name
Of Lady Guenever. Look to it, sir.

Excalbur

SIR BREUSE.

Before to-day I've seen a monkish cowl
Serve as a cloak for cunning lechery,
Nor ducked devotion for the seeing.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Peace!

Or on the word thou art an unshrived corse.

SIR BREUSE.

By God! I lie no longer in the hail
Of ribald railing that King Arthur's Court
Holds high in honour!

MORGAN.

Sheathe thine eager sword,

Thou testy brawler, lest it cut the cord
That binds thee to good hap. Sir Launcelot,
Small worship gainest thou of conflict here,
But haply misadventure.

(Exit MORGAN and SIR BREUSE.)

SIR LAUNCELOT.

Go thy ways,

Thou mock of chivalry, I kill thee not.

*(Trumpets. Enter: DUKE LUCAS, DUKE BRASTIAS,
SIR TOR, SIR ECTOR, SIR PELLEAS, and Knights.
With them twelve Ambassadors.)*

DUKE LUCAS.

Upon the stroke comes now great England's king,
Most reverend ambassadors. Be sure
He will of his great gentleness be pleased

Excalibur

**To have Rome's message in his royal hands
Before the task that waits him. Stand ye here
Beside the throne.**

SIR TOR. Hark, how the warning call
Of brazen-throated trumpets doth proclaim
His happy coming.

OMNES. Hail to England's king!
God save King Arthur!

(Enter: KING ARTHUR, with him vassal Kings, Nobles, Knights, and Pages, preceded by SIR KAY. When the King comes before the throne the Ambassadors kneel.)

FIRST AMBASSADOR. Hail, most mighty king!
Receive our homage, and of royal grace
Be pleased to listen to the solemn words
Imperial Rome has spoken.

KING ARTHUR. Who are ye,
Most venerable, that do stay the course
Of England's king upon this blessed day?
We give ye royal greeting. Let it serve
Until the high fulfilment of the hour;
Then shall we hark with unabated ear
Unto our cousin, Rome. Go on, my lords.

FIRST AMBASSADOR.
Stand, England! for our duty may not wait.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR.

How say ye, may not? Yet perforce it must,
Since we are prompted not to stay our course
For any king in Christendom. Go on.

FIRST AMBASSADOR.

Bethink thee, England, Rome speaks through our
lips,
Disworship unto her is sacrilege.

KING ARTHUR.

We are not wanting in fair courtesy,
Nor would we suffer semblance of the lack.
So be it, sirs. My lords, we crave your grace
The while we wait on these ambassadors.
Now sir, speak on.

(He ascends the throne.)

FIRST AMBASSADOR.

The mighty emperor,
Lucius, Dictator of the Public Weal
And Sovereign of the World, to England's king
Sends greeting, and commands him by the laws,
The statutes, and decrees that Cæsar made,
He that did conquer Britain and was crowned
First Emperor of Rome, that he shall swear
Liege loyalty to him, as they have sworn,
His royal predecessors, out of mind.

SIR PELLEAS.

My lords, must we sit silent under this
And hear our king missayed by Roman knaves
Nor lift a sword in answer?

Excalibur

SIR TOR. By the Mass,
Thou speakest as a man! My lord, my king,
Have done with this!

SIR LAUNCELOT. Dismiss the Embassy!

OMNES.
Down with them!

KING ARTHUR. Silence! We are crownèd king,
And as a king we listen. Finish, sir.

FIRST AMBASSADOR.
So runs Rome's high commandment: if ye fail
To render homage unto Cæsar, fail
To pay the truage rightly due to him
As sovereign lord of England —

DUKE BRASTIAS. Stay thy tongue,
Thy life is forfeit if thou sayest more!

KING ARTHUR.
Peace! Are ye knights, or knaves, that dare defy
Our royal will? Say on!

FIRST AMBASSADOR. If ye refuse
To bind yourself in vassalage to Rome,
He will forthwith wage such unkindly war
Against your realm, that to the end of time
Ye shall remain a warning to the world
Of that most fearsome chastisement that falls
On such as do deny him. We are done.

Excalibur

SIR PELLEAS.

Knights, rally to the king!

DUKE BRASTIAS.

Hell seize the churls!

DUKE LUCAS.

By all the saints of God, we'll prove our king
The peer of any Roman!

SIR PELLEAS.

Draw your swords!

KING ARTHUR.

Here to me, spearmen! guard them with your
lives

Or yours shall pay the forfeit. Hear me speak!
Am I a king of men, or lawless wolves,
That ye shall dare assail ambassadors
With olives in their hands? Strike back your
swords!

SIR LAUNCELOT.

They mocked your majesty!

SIR PELLEAS.

They did defile
The honour of our kingdom!

KING ARTHUR.

What of that?
We are no wanton, jealous of a name
That bears scant questioning, but England's king,

Excalibur

Raised on an eminence of such estate
That words are gadflies waging silly war
Against a mighty mountain. We will give
Such answer unto Rome as does befit
Our crown and England.

Lord ambassadors,
Ye shall return unscathed unto your king,
"Lucius, Dictator of the Public Weal
And Sovereign of the World." From England's
king

Bear ye our greeting; say, "Thus England spake."
The great Round Table of Pendragon's House
Is 'stablishèd to-day. An hundred knights
And fifty, stainless, ignorant of fear,
Shall form a circle none may cope withal.
To-morrow we will wed with Guenever;
Upon the day thereafter we shall go,
With raging armies that shall shake the earth,
To take possession of Imperial Rome,
Whereof we are the king and overlord.
To them that do confess us emperor
We grant abundant pardon, but to him
That doth usurp our throne, and unto them
That dare deny our lordship we shall mete
Such chastisement as doth befit their case.
The audience is ended.

OMNES.

On to Rome!

God save King Arthur! Lead us on to Rome!

Curtain.

Excalibur

SCENE II. *Camelot. The shore of the Magic Mere, Sunset.* SIR BREUSE: *enter to him,* MORGAN LE FAY.

MORGAN.

Small space have I for greetings, good Sir Breuse,
But all falls bravely in tall Camelot
And deep disorder reigns in Arthur's Court,
For Guenever is gone!

SIR BREUSE.

Whose hand is here?

I thought ye playèd pander to the king.

MORGAN.

**The which shall follow lightly: for the nonce
Wise Merlin aids us, for with potent spells
He has engulfed the girl that would be queen
In some profound abyss of mystery
Beyond the king's control.**

SIR BREUSE.

What follows?

MORGAN.

War!

Rude war betwixt the king and Merlin.

SIR BREUSE.

Ha!

I see thine import, Morgan.

MORGAN.

All is well:

We need not vex us touching Guenever,
Our work lies close at hand. The king is wroth,
And deep dissension gets betwixt the twain
That let us from the throne. Sir Launcelot

Excalibur

Sits in his haughty seige amid the knights
Of that Round Table that shall guard the king.
I see the issue of that royal whim;
Red war is out against Imperial Rome,
The while along the borders of the realm
Impatient kings are fretting at their chains,
And black confusion like a thunder cloud
Creeps to the zenith.

SIR BREUSE. Have we nought to do ?
Or may we sit and babble of the day
When I am king ?

MORGAN. I do not deal in words,
I act.

SIR BREUSE. Then lightly to thy labour.

MORGAN. **Aye,**
The while ye idly fondle dreams of state
When I have crowned ye.

SIR BREUSE. Curse thine idle tongue!
What would ye have me do?

MORGAN. Avoid my sight
That I may act alone. Stay! seek the Court
And bring me word of Merlin and the king.

SIR BREUSE.
A gentle errand!

Excalibur

MORGAN. For a gentle knight.
Farewell, Sir Breuse.
(Exit SIR BREUSE.)

Now I have ample swing;
Come forth, my sword! Hola, brave Nimue!

(Enter from the Mere: NIMUE.)

NIMUE.
Unhorsed, but in the lists. Grant me a quest,
And I will lift mine honour from the deep
Where Merlin hurled it.

MORGAN. Cope with him again
With better fortune: now another task
Of gentler savour have I for thy hand.
Anon King Arthur walks beside the Mere,
If thou didst whisper in his hungry ear
The thing I bade thee.

NIMUE. " King, the spell dissolves
At sunset, by the Magic Mere, to-night! "

MORGAN.
Where ye shall soon encounter with him. See!
How like a jaded warrior the sun
Stands halting on the world's empurpled shore
Before he plunges in the sea of night;
The tide is at the flood and Arthur comes.
Entreat him worshipfully; give him pause,
Until I ring him with a magic sleep:

Excalibur

Then sink with him a thousand fathoms down
The where I wait thee.

NIMUE.
Of eager feet.

Hush, I hear the fall

MORGAN. And on the word I go.
(Exit MORGAN.)

NIMUE.
And I will crouch me for a splendid spring.
This hunting likes me well: come, little king!

(*Enter: KING ARTHUR.*)

KING ARTHUR.

“ At sunset by the Magic Mere to-night
The spell dissolves.” So breathed a passing voice,
And I, a king, perforce must walk alone
Beside a cursèd lake, and wait on chance
To give me that is mine. And Merlin — hell
Would lightly cast him forth an’ he were dead,
Therefore he lives, and cloaks him with a cloud
Of black, impenetrable sorcery,
As he has shrouded Guenever — By God!
I’ll burn him for high treason if he crawls
Once more within my grasp.— And Guenever!
I cannot see her, yet the sun is gone,
And noisome pestilence is lifting white
Above the Mere. Who played this sorry jest
Upon me for my shame? What whitened there?
Was it a ghostly creature from the lake
Or was it Guenever?

Excalibur

NIMUE. Most noble king,
I know thine errand, and I pledge my faith
Thou shalt achieve.

KING ARTHUR. What do ye, lady fair,
So far from Camelot?

NIMUE. The king's behest,
And my devoir unto his majesty.
Mistrust me not; I would befriend thee, sir,
And to that end I spake.

KING ARTHUR.
I gained the warning?

It was from thee

NIMUE. Aye, "The spell dissolves
To-night, at sunset, by the Magic Mere."

KING ARTHUR.
And Guenever?

NIMUE. Shall lie within thy hand
Despite Sir Merlin, ere the twilight goes
And darkness gathers.

KING ARTHUR. What is this to thee,
That thou shouldst play the part of mine ally?

NIMUE.
Am I not subject unto England's crown
In equal measure with the watchful knights?
And shall I turn aside when treachery
Slides serpent-wise to sting thee?

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. What is hid
Behind the arras of thy woven words?

NIMUE.
Swift warning!

KING ARTHUR. Give it voice.

NIMUE. The sorcerer;
Endure him not lest thou shouldst see the crown
Reft from thee like thy mistress.

KING ARTHUR. What of her ?
I hold a sword that well defends a crown,
Yet is it helpless here. Speak lightly, girl,
If thou know'st ought of Guenever.

NIMUE. My lord,
My honour on her coming. Of thy grace
I pray thee sit, and school thine eagerness
Until the stroke when Merlin's magic fails
And Guenever is free.

KING ARTHUR. What art thou, then?
How cam'st thou by this knowledge? By the Mass
I do misdoubt thee.

NIMUE. And thou dost me hurt
By thinking malice of my championship:
Nathless I will content thee. Guenever
Fled all distraught with dole from Camelot,
For that old Merlin sought to weave a spell

Excalbur

About her that should lift a wall of brass
Forever 'twixt her and the world of men.

(Soft music; the mist from the lake deepens.)

I found her crouching in the reedy sedge
And baffled Merlin, for I won a charm
Most potent, from the Lady of the Lake
Long since, for service, and he saw her not.

(The Lake Girls rise silently above the Mere; they come softly forward and dance around the KING and NIMUE.)

Within a mystic land of drifting dreams,
A realm of faery, ringed with summer seas,
She lieth, sleeping, 'til the long kiss frees
Her veiled eyes of slumber. Level beams
Of sultry sunlight linger drowsily
Around her bed of roses, faint with love.
Give me thy hand, and thou shalt bend above
To breathe her name, and she shall wake to thee.

(The mist has deepened until all is obscured. It flushes rose colour and slowly dissolves.)

SCENE III. *Beneath the Magic Mere. A hall of the enchanted castle. MORGAN LE FAY in the guise of GUENEVER is seated on a splendid throne. KING ARTHUR lies at her feet, his head on her knees. Lake Girls are dancing softly in a ring about the throne.)*

MORGAN.

O thou that art the king of earthly kings,
The flower of chivalry and my true love,

Excalbur

Come from the misty land of dreams. Awake!
Unclose thine eyes and look upon my face,
Dost thou not know me?

KING ARTHUR.

Guenever!

MORGAN.

My king,
And worshipfullest lord of all my life,
I love thee.

KING ARTHUR.

Say that word again! Dear God,
I know not if I sleep, or by the spell
Of sorcery am prisoned in a dream.
Oh, let me wake no more, whiche'er it is,
But lie forever in thy circling arms.
I love thee, Guenever!

MORGAN.

With all my soul,
With all my body, and with all my life
I do thee worship, Arthur.

KING ARTHUR.

Bend thy face
Close, close above me. Let me drink the wine
Of passion from the chalice of thy lips
'Til I am drunk with love! O Guenever,
Let me but love thee while the sliding sands
Tell one short hour of night, and I will die
Content with life.

Excalbur

MORGAN. Not one, but endless hours
Reach on before us like a golden dream.
Time knocks not on the gates of Love's demesne
Where I have brought thee. Very far away
The world of men lies cold and desolate,
Unwitting of us and of us forgot.
This is the Land of Love, where I am queen;
Wilt thou be king?

KING ARTHUR. Throned in thy closing arms
I ask one only boon; to cast away
My earthly kingship.

MORGAN. See, they open wide
To clasp thee close.

KING ARTHUR. Oh, take me to thy heart,
And let me feel thy body grow to mine
Until one fierce, incarnate love is all,
And life melts into death.

MORGAN. Not yet, not yet!
Bethink thee of the price thou needs must pay.
Wilt thou renounce thy crown for very love,
Forsake the knightly quest, the shock of war,
Thy royal House and England?

KING ARTHUR. On my knees
I swear to cast them, Guenever, away,
Nor ask them ever, for the love of thee.

Excalibur

MORGAN.

Now do I know in sooth thou lov'st me well,
And for thy paltry kingdom cast aside,
I give thee, love, another kingdom, meet
For such as thou, the Land of Living Love,
Where we will lie forever, lapped in dreams
And lost to all the world.

KING ARTHUR.

To all the world!
Farewell, my futile visions of estate,
My royal crown, my swift and savage Sword;
Farewell, proud Merlin, baffled of thy goal
And blind with arrogance, cast down to hell
The while I reign in heaven, crownèd king
Of love and Guenever!

MORGAN.

Give me thy Sword,
That I may cherish it, and in the flame
Of blazing jewels burning on the hilt
See perfect proving of thy perfect love,
For with the Sword goes England.

KING ARTHUR.

Take the toy
That is the badge of vassalage to man,
And give me aid to cast this harness off,
I need it not.

*(The Lake Girls remove his armour: MORGAN takes
EXCALIBUR and lifts it high in the air.)*

MORGAN.

Now swear upon thy Sword,
And by the faith of thy true body swear

Excalbur

That thou wilt bear liege love and loyalty
Forever unto me and to my land.

KING ARTHUR.

Upon my Sword, and by the blameless faith
Of this my body, Guenever, I swear
I will do no disworship unto thee,
But yield unending love and service.

MORGAN.

Come!

(The mist closes.)

SCENE IV. *The shore of the Magic Mere: all is hidden in pale mist that slowly melts away. MERLIN is standing beside ARTHUR, who is lying upon the ground without his armour or Sword. Moonlight.*

KING ARTHUR.

Where art thou, Guenever? The moving mist
Came close betwixt us and I saw thee not.
Give me thy lips and lift me to thy heart:
Where art thou, Guenever?

MERLIN.

Where is thy Sword?

KING ARTHUR.

What vision mocks me from the barren world
I lightly cast away? Begone, gray ghost,
Nor vex me with thy face!

MERLIN.

Where is thy Sword?

Excalbur

KING ARTHUR.

Who sent thee hither to the Land of Love,
Thou baleful portent? That thou hast the garb
And hungry visage of the sorcerer,
Gray Merlin, I confess.

MERLIN.

Where is thy Sword?

KING ARTHUR.

I gave it, starling-tongue, to Guenever
In pledge of love, as I would give the world
An' I possessed it. As I gave my crown,
My kingdom, all!

MERLIN.

Thou silly, babbling fool,
Look 'round; dost know this place, and dost
thou see
The Lady Guenever?

KING ARTHUR.

Speak, sorcerer!
Hast thou through black enchantment reft her
hence?
What hast thou done with Guenever? By God,
An' thou hast harmed her, I will gnaw thy heart
Before thine eyes!

MERLIN.

Oh, what a thing is man,
When he has cast away the flimsy guise
The world bestows to veil his nakedness.
And I must work with such unhandy tools
As these to carve a kingdom.

Excalibur

KING ARTHUR. Wil't thou speak?
Or must I cut the truth from out thy maw:
Where is my lady?

MERLIN. Hid in Camelot.
Nor has she moved therefrom since I upreared
A mist betwixt ye that ye may not pass.

KING ARTHUR.
Thou liest, Merlin, for I lay but now
Upon her breast, within the Magic Mere,
Whence thou didst draw me by malignant spells
To make me serve thee.

MERLIN. Since thou didst fall on sleep
Thou hast not seen the Lady Guenever,
But thou hast wantoned with a damnèd witch
Beneath the waters of the lake of hell,
And for an hour of lechery hast sold
Thy maidenhood and lost Excalibur.

KING ARTHUR.
I hear thy words, but as the senseless din
Of summer thunder.

MERLIN. Thou shalt understand
Their heavy import shortly. Mark me well:
Such futile treason was not since the day
When Judas sold Christ Jesu. Thou art he
That bartered England for an harlot's kiss.
My weary eyes, that scarce can mark the course
Upon the dial of the shadow's path,
Saw through the weltering waters of the Mere

Excalibur

Down to the murky depths. I saw thee crawl
A wanton suppliant at a witch's feet;
I saw thee hang upon her mocking lips
And sell the Sword I bravèd hell to win.

KING ARTHUR.

O Merlin, I am as a troubled child
That wakes from noisome dreams. I cannot see,
I know not what I say. Give me thy hand
And gentle pardon for unknighly words,
Read me the cursèd riddle!

MERLIN.

Endless years
Have I wrought patiently to save this land.
The curse was lifted, and I crowned thee king
And gave thee that which should have made thee
lord
Of such a kingdom as were fit for God.
Against thee hurtled all the craft of hell
To gain Excalibur, and thou didst prove
A faithless warder; traitor to thy name
And knightly lineage. The Sword is gone.

KING ARTHUR.

Merlin, I love her as I love my God;
'Twas Guenever!

MERLIN.

'Twas Morgan, hight le Fay,
Thy sister.

KING ARTHUR.

Jesu, mercy!

(He falls upon his face.)

Excalibur

MERLIN. For thy sin,
For thine unholy incest, cry to God
For pardon. Thou shalt pay the penalty
With thine own blood, and I may save thee not
Although I love thee as an only son.
A little time is left us ere the doom
Falls on thee. Swear to do my will
And we may baffle Morgan, save the State,
And render it into the hand of God.
Swear me, King Arthur, and I win the Sword.

KING ARTHUR.
Blast me, Lord God, with lightning, for my sin,
Else will I tear mine eyes from out my face
And sink my body in the cursèd Mere!

MERLIN.
Rend not thy body, Arthur, rend thy soul;
For that thou art a perjured, bawdy knave,
Foul with dishonour; yet I know indeed
That thing must lie with God. I deal with thee
As King of England, I may give no heed
Unto thy soul but only to thy Sword,
The which I will achieve if thou wilt swear.

KING ARTHUR.
What shall I do to gain Excalibur?

MERLIN.
Wilt thou be sworn?

KING ARTHUR. Yea, Merlin, I will swear.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Renounce thou by thy knighthood love and lust;
Swear by Christ Jesu's wounds that thou wilt live
A spotless knight, and I will win the Sword.

KING ARTHUR.

I cannot, Merlin.

MERLIN.

What, thou wilt not swear?

KING ARTHUR.

I cannot, Merlin. Lust I fling away,
And, by God's grace, I keep myself from sin
If He will help me. Love I hold mine own;
For I have sworn an oath to Guenever
And I will keep it if I lose the crown.

MERLIN.

Bethink thee, king, for England hangs on this;
Excalibur is gone. Ambassadors
But lately come from out disdainful Rome
Already are returning to their king
That threats thee with invasion. Grimly war
Shall compass England with a ring of death
Advancing dauntlessly upon thy throne
Where thou art shrinking in a woman's arms.
What shall they profit thee if thou art bare
Of thy most sure defence, Excalibur?

KING ARTHUR.

Forsake thy vision, Merlin; let me go
And hide me in the refuge of my love.

Excalibur

I am not of such metal as a king
Is fashionèd, and I shall fail thee sore
If thou dost wield me. Give me Guenever,
And let me sink in dim forgetfulness
The while thou find'st a weapon to thy mind.
I may not serve thee.

MERLIN. Yet perforce thou shalt;
I know thy temper and it suits me well,
Despite thy softness. None may save this land
And bring the kingdom of the living God
Upon this earth, but only thou thyself.
Deny thy destiny and hell prevails,
The night descends, and man shall grope in vain
Through murky shadows for the hand of God,
Nor find it ever. Seize the Sword and reign!
So shall thy name be blazoned on the page
Of God's great chronicle of blessed saints
That do His service for His people's sake.

KING ARTHUR.
Give back my lady and I do thy will;
Yea, Merlin, even to the uttermost
And latest, lingering drop of mine own blood;
Deny me, and I give thee back the crown.

MERLIN.
What profits me my wisdom when I wage
Uneven warfare 'gainst hot-headed love
That weighs a beating heart against the world ?
Needs must I meet thy humour. Hear me, boy ;
The rune is written. " Now Pendragon's seed

Excalibur

Shall slay Pendragon for Pendragon's lust."
Read thou the import. Yet a little while
And Morgan bears a child within whose veins
Runs, dark and turbid, great Pendragon's blood.
By him thou diest, king!

KING ARTHUR. And in this wise,
For mine own wanton act, the doom shall fall.
So be it, Merlin. Ye have space to act
And I to do thy bidding, ere the wrath
Of God is on me. Give me Guenever,
And when I go the crown shall fall again
Unto Pendragon's seed.

(A long pause.)

MERLIN. Yea, that is well.
And in despite of destiny I yield
Unto thine inclination.

KING ARTHUR. Pledge thy word,
Thine honour, and thine oath to give me her
That I do love, the Lady Guenever,
To make her queen.

MERLIN. That thing I soothly do,
Wilt thou be sworn?

KING ARTHUR. Yea, Merlin, I will swear.

Excalibur

MERLIN.

Then, by God's wounds and by thy body's faith,
Swear to forsake all lust forevermore,
But live unstained and devoid of sin.

KING ARTHUR.

By Jesu's Blood and by the faith I owe
Unto my knighthood I do swear the oath.

MERLIN.

Come thou with me, the day is not yet lost
Though perilled grievously, for nevermore
May I compel the false and paynim witch
To render up Excalibur. Be true
Unto thine oath; we may save England yet,
Though hardly.

(He leads ARTHUR to the brink of the Mere.)

Stand thou by me while I call
Upon the loathly witch to hear my voice,
And by the power of the awful spell
That by God's grace I weave around her, yield
The Sword of Joseph to thy waiting hand.
Art ready, boy?

KING ARTHUR.

Here stand I, Merlin: speak!

MERLIN.

When thou dost see an arm from out the Mere,

Excalibur

Robed in white samite, lift above the flood,
Grasp thou the proffered hilt.

KING ARTHUR.

I will obey.

MERLIN.

Morgan le Fay, by grace of Him that lives
Lord God of Heaven and Earth, and by the spell
So awful and so potent, of the king
Great Solomon of Israel, obey!
Around the Magic Mere I weave the rune
That locks thee helpless in an iron ring.
From thy duress thou may'st not win away,
Thou lewd and miscreant fayter, without scathe
Unless ye render ransom. Yield the Sword
That with mal-engine thou didst win away.
Yield thou the Sword!

(A sound of wailing rises from the lake.)

Must I then ask again?
I give thee warning, lightly yield the Sword,
For if thou haltest till the lifting moon
Mounts skyward by the breadth of half a hand
I'll damn thee down to hell!

*(Clouds obscure the moon and a fierce wind rushes
across the lake. The wailing increases to a shriek.)*

Yield thou the Sword!
Dost think to fright me with the stour of storm,
And let me from my quest with futile din?
Thou art assotted, Morgan. Yield the Sword!

Excalibur

(The storm bursts with a tempest of thunder and lightning.)

Ha, ha! ye fight with weapons weak with rust!
Howl, tempests, 'til ye blast the shrinking earth;
Blaze, all ye lightnings, split the sky in shards
And hurl the reeling stars in torrents down,
Ye cannot move me from a mighty quest.
I bandy words no longer. Yield the Sword
Before my heart beats thrice within my breast
Or thou art damned! Yield thou Excalibur!

(A pale, greenish light rises and illuminates the surface of the lake. Within Arthur's reach an arm arises, brilliantly lighted, holding Excalibur. He seizes it and brandishes it in the glare of lightning. The light vanishes and the moon bursts through the clouds.)

ANGELIC VOICES.

Hail, Pendragon!
Lord of the Sword.
Crownèd of England
saviour and king,
Arise! O thou servant of God,
for the dawn burgeons white on the world
and the Lord Christ has armed thee to-day.
The Sword is won
and hell is confounded!
Back from England
cowers the curse.

Etcalibur
Ralph Adams Cram